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Christmas at King's

The story of the iconic
choir's world-famous
carol service

**BBC
RADIO
3**

Christmas on
BBC TV & Radio 3
See p115 for
highlights

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Our guide to 12 festive
organ masterpieces

**The choral genius
of Herbert Howells**

**British composer
Thea Musgrave at 90**

**The Snowman's
Howard Blake
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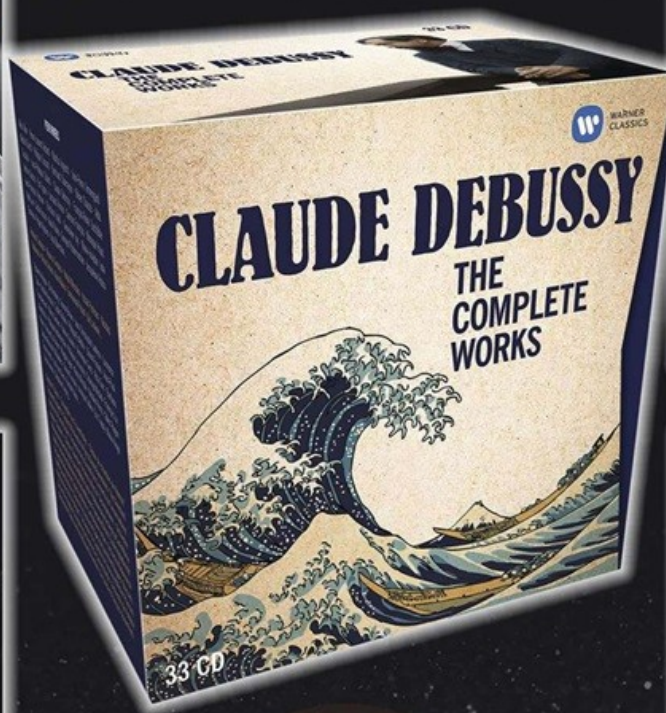
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Welcome



One way to keep tradition alive is to keep changing it. It's been the task of King's College's director of music Stephen Cleobury to preserve the essence of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols but to ensure that each service remains fresh. Which is trickier than it sounds. The opening carol,

closing voluntary and all readings are identical each year, organists/readers saddled with the responsibility of keeping the ship sailing on smooth waters. But even the most hardened of Nine Lessons veterans don't want the music to slide far outside their comfort zone – after all, part of Christmas's magic is its evocation of childhood memories, many of which are tied up with specific carol arrangements. And Daniel Hyde, Cleobury's successor from 2019, tells me that he's already been begged not to fiddle with the descants. What to do? For the past 35 years, Cleobury's triumphant solution has been to commission a new carol each year (starting in 1983 with Lennox Berkeley's *In Wintertime*). While some get all excited about a John Lewis advertisement, I must admit that the annual unveiling of the mystery composer is, for me, one of the highlights of Christmas.

Inspired by the annual King's commission, we've been inviting composers since 2014 to pen you all a carol. This year, Dobrinka Tabakova has come up trumps with a scintillating piece (p50). Let us know how you get on!

Oliver Condy

Oliver Condy Editor

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Richard Morrison
Critic and journalist

'Going behind the scenes at King's College, Cambridge, I was surprised by how passionate everyone is about Stephen Cleobury's last Nine Lessons & Carols. It's going to be an emotional Christmas Eve.' **Page 32**



Dobrinka Tabakova
Composer

'I was thrilled to be invited to write this year's magazine carol. It's an upbeat, jolly setting of the Cornish *Heavenly* sound, inspired by my time as composer-in-residence at Truro Cathedral. I hope you enjoy learning it!' **Page 50**



Paul Spicer
Author and choral director

'Herbert Howells has been one of the great influences of my life. He was my composition teacher, I have written his biography and have recorded his choral music. It's wonderful to introduce him to new readers here.' **Page 62**

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Stephen Cleobury

BBC music
MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

Plus the musical present we'd like
to receive for Christmas this year

Editor Oliver Condy

Hauptwerk virtual pipe organ software

Deputy editor Jeremy Pound

A course of singing lessons

Managing editor Rebecca Franks

A tastefully musical cuckoo clock

Reviews editor Michael Beek

Amelodica (or pianica)

Editorial assistant Freya Parr

A smaller accordion...or longer arms!

Cover CD editor Alice Pearson

A portable speaker for my study

Listings editor Paul Riley

Some decent wireless headphones

Art editor Dav Ludford

A Jew's harp

Designer Liam McAuley

Picture editor Sarah Kennett

Thanks to Daniel Jaffé

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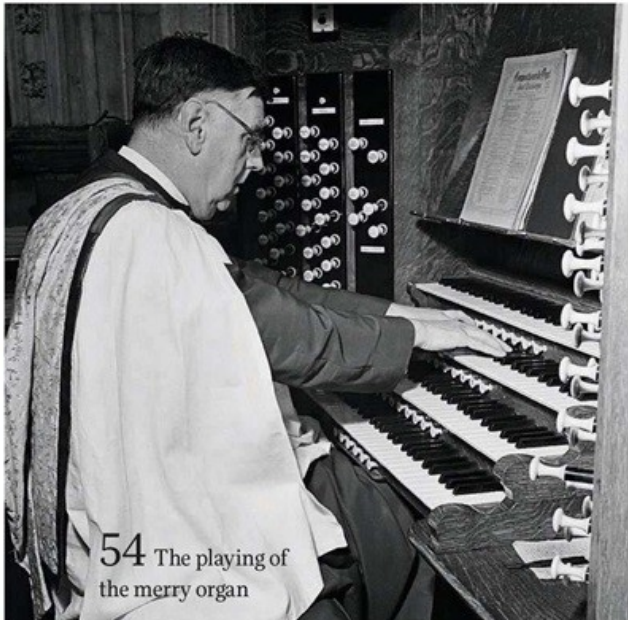
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Christmas reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings, DVDs and books



Pianist Víkingur Ólafsson plays Bach

72 Recording of the Month



Johann Sebastian Bach
Víkingur Ólafsson

'Intermingling celebrated transcriptions with Bach's original works, Ólafsson creates a ravishing musical sequence'

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LETTER
of the
MONTH



Master of the bow:
but Paganini was also
skilled at the guitar

Plucky Paganini

Your November issue articles on Paganini were interesting and authoritative, but it's a pity that no mention was made of his dazzling guitar playing and important contribution to the literature of that instrument. Paganini once stated that his guitar was 'my constant companion on all my travels' and he was acquainted with many of the leading players of the day, notably Giuliani, Carulli, Legnani and Zani de Ferranti. In a book of 1831, Carulli spoke of Paganini as 'an

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excellent performer on the guitar' while Berlioz, himself a player, called him 'an incomparable guitarist'. There is no record of Paganini ever giving a public recital on the guitar, so only a small, fortunate handful of souls ever saw him play. Yet he wrote over 100 pieces for solo guitar, including the A major sonata. Your articles didn't cover the full extent of his genius.

KG Banks, Maidstone

Defining Bernstein

In regard to your *20 works that defined a century* cover feature (December), I would have found a place for Leonard Bernstein. For example, there is his Symphony No. 2, 'The Age of Anxiety', inspired by WH Auden's long poem of that name. This post-Second World War period referred to by the title is the troubled age of psycho-analysis, both Freudian and Jungian. Bernstein was a fully paid-up

member, having sessions every week with his 'shrink'. Or I would nominate Bernstein's *Mass: A Theatre Piece*, which gave voice to anti-Vietnam War feelings and the frustration of youth. He set famous lines by Paul Simon: 'half the people are drowned and the others are swimming in the wrong direction'. But perhaps the most obvious of all his compositions, in terms of influence on later Broadway thinking about the form and

content of the musical, is the collaborative work that is *West Side Story*.

Humphrey Burton, via email

The editor replies: Sitting down and discussing which 20 pieces of music best defined the political, scientific and social changes of the 100 years since the end of World War I was an enjoyable challenge. We would love to hear other readers' opinions of what we really should have included in the list!

Woody by the wood

A notable omission to your article *Into the Woods* (December) must surely be Elgar's beautiful 'Woodland Interlude' from *Caractacus*. Elgar was inspired by walks in the woods near the Malvern Hills. He stayed in a cottage in the woods, Birchwood Lodge, from where he wrote 'This is what I hear all day: the trees are singing my music. Or have I sung theirs? I suppose I have'.

Wendy Fermor, Poynton

Not-so virtuoso

It was interesting to read Richard Morrison's article on virtuoso performers (November) and then turn the page to read the article on Paganini with side bar on Liszt (see also *Letter of the Month*, left). But given Morrison's (surely correct) argument that performing technique has improved beyond measure during the last century, it set me wondering that, were it possible somehow to bring back Liszt and Paganini and hear them perform, would we still be wowed by their virtuosity, or by comparison with modern performers would we consider them merely ordinary?

Bruce Carlin, via email

Station sounds

Your news story about Berlin's stations being intent on dissuading some would-be habitués (*Full Score*, November) reminds me of Southern Railway's efforts at Waterloo, both during and after World War II, to hasten the footsteps of morning travellers with martial music – encouraging the city's minions to fall into step – while, in the evenings, soothing their jaded nerves by enticing them to waltz up the platform. The only sound I hear today from time to time, as a warning of catastrophe, is the fog whistle sounding from The Lizard lighthouse – no longer the deep bullroarer sounding a very low E flat. Perhaps Waterloo still braces those lucky enough to find a train to work, and caresses them at the end of the day as they hope to be carried home?

Rev John Palmer, The Lizard

The editor replies: Sadly, the prevalent sounds at Waterloo today are largely the hustle and bustle of commuters



Czech him out:
has Martinů been
unfairly neglected?

plus regular announcements of departures, delays and cancellations. A little musical light relief would not go amiss.

Warlock wronged

I read with interest Terry Blain's *Building a Library* feature on Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony* (November). In it, he refers to the now infamous 'cow looking over a gate' comment attributed to Peter Warlock, which has been taken out of context. The quote was part of a brief exchange between Warlock and Robert Nichols, described by the latter in the 'At Oxford' chapter which he contributed to Cecil Gray's memoir of the composer. Nichols recalls that: '...after a performance of VW's *Pastoral Symphony* he (Warlock) exclaimed "A truly splendid work!" and then, with a smile, "You know I've only one thing to say against the composer's music: it is all just a little too much like a cow looking over a gate. Nonetheless he is a very great composer and the more I hear the more I admire him"'. It is more than likely that the 'cow and gate' bit in the

middle was a mischievous quip made to a friend about VW's music in general, rather than about the *Pastoral Symphony*, and shouldn't be taken too seriously. The only reliable record we have of Warlock's actual words in response to the *Pastoral Symphony* lie in the 1924 edition of *The Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians*, in which he writes: '...undoubtedly VW's greatest achievement up to the present time...'

**Michael Graves, Chairman,
Peter Warlock Society**

Missing Martinů

Every month, the first place I look when receiving my new copy of *BBC Music Magazine* is to see which composer's work will be included on the CD in the following month. Every month, I hope and hope... and every month my hopes are dashed. When, oh when, will there be a recording of a symphony by Martinů? The neglect of this great Czech composer is nothing short of scandalous. Only two of his symphonies have ever been performed at the BBC Proms – No. 4 once, and No. 6 three

times, the last occasion as far back as 2010. If there is a better ending to a symphony than that of the Fourth, I have yet to hear it. Since the sad death last year of conductor Jiří Bělohlávek, Martinů appears to have no champion. So, come on *BBC Music Magazine*, it's time for some of his music!

Keith Nixon, Sunderland

Don't forget Offenbach!

Every year in the classical music world we are urged to observe, or indeed celebrate the centenary/bicentenary/whichever birthday of classical composers, some more eminent than others. This year's most obvious one has been Leonard Bernstein, and I think he has been well served on the stage and concert platform. Next year is the bi-centenary of a composer, German by birth, but because of his associations more often considered French. I speak of course of Offenbach, born in Cologne on 20 June 1819. His melodies are probably better-known than almost any other in the classical canon, although not everyone knows that they are humming or whistling tunes such as the Barcarolle from *Tales of Hoffmann*, or the Can-Can from *Orpheus in the Underworld*. I'm sure his bicentenary will be celebrated in France (at least!), but are there any plans for British orchestras or opera companies to perform or stage some of his magnificent works – maybe even the lesser-known ones?

Ninian Fergus, via email

The editor replies: We at *BBC Music Magazine* do have plans to celebrate Offenbach next year – possibly followed by a pint or two of the beer that famously used his Barcarolle to accompany their TV adverts for many years.



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BBC *music*
MAGAZINE

The *full* score

Our pick of the month's news, views and interviews

BBC Young Choristers of the Year crowned

Singers from North Yorkshire and Gloucestershire enjoy success



Sweet singing:
Emilia Jaques, one
of this year's winners

'If at first you don't succeed...' The old adage has proved gloriously true for Emilia Jaques. A losing finalist in last year's BBC Radio 2 Young Choristers of the Year competition, the 15-year-old soprano from North Yorkshire returned this year to take the trophy, impressing the judges with her performances of Stainer and Handel. Cassian Pichler-Roca from Gloucestershire triumphed in the boys' competition.

After opting for slow-paced repertoire last year, Jaques, a chorister at Queen Mary's School, Thirsk, took on the tricky twists and turns of 'Blessed are all they that fear the Lord' from Handel's *Sing Unto God*. It was a well-advised tactic, reckoned Simon Lole, one of the judges in the final. In congratulating Jaques on her technique

in negotiating the aria's semi-quaver runs, Lole said that she 'really brought it to life', adding that 'the sense of energy and the sense of line and flow were very good.'

Pichler-Roca, meanwhile, impressed in John Dankworth's *Light of the World* and the hymn 'Christ Triumphant'. 'You sang beautifully and with great understanding,' explained Lole after his performance. 'I liked the fact that you communicated with the audience and your rapport with the accompanist was excellent too.' Pichler-Roca, a treble in Tewkesbury Abbey's Schola Cantorum, is not the first member of that choir to enjoy success at the BBC Young Choristers of the Year competition – Laurence Kilsby, who now plies his trade as an opera tenor, did likewise in 2009.

The final took place, like last year, at BBC Philharmonic Studios in MediacityUK, and was hosted by *Blue Peter* presenter Radzi Chinyanganya. As well as Lole, who is the former director of music at Sheffield and Salisbury cathedrals, the judges included composer Bob Chilcott (see p21) and Caroline Redman Lusher, the founder and director of the Rock Choir. Jaques's and Pichler-Roca's achievement will bring with it many opportunities to sing on BBC Radio over the forthcoming months, and both have already been into the studio to record a disc to be covermounted on the May issue of *BBC Music Magazine*.

Young Chorister 2018 Competition finalists



Treble top: 2018's Cassian Pichler-Roca

Frederick Butler (*Canterbury Cathedral*)
Alexander Leatherbarrow (*Liverpool Cathedral*)
Cassian Pichler-Roca (*Tewkesbury Abbey*)
Oliver Simcock (*Warwick School*)
Grace Dixon (*St Asaph Cathedral*)
Brooke Elley (*Norwich Cathedral*)
Emilia Jaques (*Queen Mary's School, Thirsk*)
Sophie Stringfellow (*St Matthew's Choir, Northampton*)

Rising Stars

Three to look out for...

Alena Baeva Violinist



Born: Osh, Kyrgyzstan
Career highlight: Playing Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with the Russian State Symphony Orchestra under Vladimir Jurowski. The three-hour rehearsal was so

memorable – we completely revised the piece and breathed new life into it.

Musical hero: Anyone who transcends the borders of their time, like Beethoven; or their instrument, like pianist Mikhail Pletnev; or their life, like Schubert.

Dream concert: One in which all the elements just click together: courageous musicians, an inspiring acoustic and a careful and curious audience all feeling present in the moment.

Katie Jeffries-Harris Contralto



Born: Peterborough, England
Career highlight: Performing for the first time at Milton Abbey as a member of VOCES8. I was introduced as their new alto at their Summer

Music Festival this year.

Musical hero: The Sixteen is such a giant in the choral music world and its director Harry Christophers is an inspiring musician. I was thrilled to work with him and Eamonn Dougan through the Genesis Sixteen scheme.

Dream concert: I am a massive choral music geek and there are so many ensembles I want to see perform. Top of the list is the American ensemble Roomful of Teeth whose use of extended vocal technique I find fascinating.

Ming Xie Pianist



Born: Suining, China
Career highlight: I'd have to say my Russian debut with the Mariinsky Orchestra and Valery Gergiev in Vladivostok and again in St Petersburg at the Mariinsky Theatre

just a few months later.

Musical hero: I studied with Sergei Babayan at the Juilliard School, and he brought me into another sphere of music, full of colours and passion. I also really admire French pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, having collected many of his CDs in junior high.

Dream concert: I'd love to perform at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the brand-new auditorium in my hometown of Chengdu and, of course, the Stern Auditorium in my second home, New York.



Pong cycle:
Anthony Hewitt
(left) and Alistair
Rutherford

Cycling viola player adds another bowl to his strings

Last year, we reported how one Alistair Rutherford had achieved the unlikely but noble feat of running the fastest marathon dressed as a viola. As this issue goes to press, the music research assistant and his outfit are set to hit the road again, this time covering the 180 miles from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire to the 45th International Viola Congress in Rotterdam by bicycle (with some sea in between, obviously). Rutherford is

being joined for the trip – which aims to raise funds for the musical charity ARCO – by pianist Anthony Hewitt who, as our regular readers will know, is a veteran long-distance cyclist. For viola-related reasons too complex to explain here, Hewitt will also be dressing up... as a loo. We will, of course, refrain from viola jokes and toilet humour as we wish 'The Cycling Viola' and 'The Olympianist' the best of luck on their joint venture.

THE MONTH IN NUMBERS

30

...variations. Glenn Gould's annotated score of Bach's *Goldbergs*, a unique insight into the pianist's working methods, goes up for sale this month.

95

...years old. In his tenth decade, director Franco Zeffirelli has been invited to stage the Royal Opera House Muscat's new Verdi *Rigoletto*.

720,000

...pounds. A violin from the early 1700s belonging to English court musician and spy William Corbett has beaten its auction estimate by £420,000.



16

...successful years as music director at the Royal Opera House. And now Antonio Pappano (above) has signed up for five more at Covent Garden.

GETTY, LICH SUN, GEORGIA EVANS



Zitong Wang (16, China) performs during the 2015 Cliburn Junior preliminary round

Celebrating Cliburn's legacy

The name Van Cliburn has long been associated with the recognition and celebration of outstanding musicians. The Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition and Festival continues this proud tradition

Since its launch in 1962, the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition has propelled the careers of many remarkable artists. The quadrennial event, known simply as the Cliburn, attracts top talents from around the world to its base in Fort Worth, Texas, with finalists guaranteed handsome cash prizes and prestigious international concerts.

But that's not all: Cliburn's passionate belief in classical music's power to build 'friendships, memories and strengthened

artistic determination' also led to the launch of the Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition and Festival in 2015.

This competition, open to pianists aged 13-17, is set to celebrate its second edition from 31 May to 8 June 2019 on the campus of SMU.

The 2019 Junior Competition, the first major Cliburn programme to take place in Dallas, Texas, offers matchless experiences to its participants, from a final date with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Ruth Reinhardt to workshop sessions with

top artists (including an international jury headed by Alessio Bax), performances in the community and one-to-one mentoring.

'We're making a Cliburn camp,' comments Jacques Marquis, the competition's President and CEO. 'The festival atmosphere and the sharing and learning process belong to the Cliburn Junior. We want them to learn from our wonderful jury, from esteemed Cliburn laureates and from each other. It's about opening as many windows of opportunity as possible.'



Elizabeth Joy Roe and Greg Anderson interview Amir Saraj (15, United States) on the 2015 webcast
The 2015 Cliburn Junior winners: (l to r) Arsenii Mun, second; Alim Beisembayev, first; and Youlan Ji, third



Van Cliburn

1934 – 2013

Sixty years ago Van Cliburn, then a 23-year-old pianist from Texas, stormed to success at the inaugural Moscow International Tchaikovsky Competition. His victory contradicted the Cold War script of Soviet cultural superiority and handed a propaganda coup to the West. He was welcomed home as a hero with a ticker-tape parade in New York – the only musician ever to receive the honour; four years later, in 1962, a competition was established in his name that reflected his artistic ethos, with an emphasis on launching careers.

THE CLIBURN JUNIOR IN NUMBERS

10 *The closing date is 10 January 2019*

Applications for the Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition are now open for pianists aged 13–17, and will close on 10 January 2019 – the same date that tickets go on sale. Competitors will be announced on 13 March 2019, with the final round and awards ceremony taking place on 8 June 2019.

26 *nations entered the 2015 junior comp*

The 160 applications to enter the 2015 Cliburn International Junior Competition came from 26 countries, with 14 nations represented at the finals. Alim Beisembayev, 17, from Kazakhstan took first prize, with Arsenii Mun, 16, from Russia, and 16-year-old Youlan Ji from China scooping second and third prizes. Clayton Stephenson, 16, from the United States, and Tony Yike Yang, 16, from Canada, were honoured with jury discretionary awards.

4 *years between each Cliburn competition*

While many classical music competitions operate every year, several reinforce their special status by observing a longer gap between editions. Just like the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, the Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition takes place every four years. Audience ovations and rave reviews for the first edition in 2015 suggest the wait is very much worthwhile.

24 *pianists make the preliminaries*

This year's competition will see 24 entrants, selected by a screening jury, whittled down to six semi-finalists and three finalists. The three Junior Competition finalists in 2019 will receive cash awards worth \$15,000 for the first-prize winner, \$10,000 for the second and \$5,000 for the third, with scholarships, mentoring schemes and other bonuses built into their prize packages.

14 *non-competing pianists will attend*

In addition to the 24 competition entrants, the Cliburn will host 14 non-competing pianists for the first time. The extra cohort of young musicians is set to enhance the competition's festival atmosphere as masterclass and workshop participants, and reach out to audiences with concerts in Dallas.

1m *minutes of footage viewed*

The Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition and Festival provides a remarkable platform for the gifted pianists who enter. Online video footage from 2015's series of events has resulted in more than 250,000 views to date, totalling in excess of 1.7 million minutes watched by viewers in 170 countries around the world. All performances of the Cliburn Junior will again be webcast live and on demand.



SoundBites



Colourful sounds: the Life Art display case

Painting with Pavarotti

Luciano Pavarotti's love of painting is being celebrated with the one-off sale of 'Life Art', a new display case that comes complete with artists' tools, paints and a digital music player. Aimed at the luxury end of the market – just ten are being made and each is selling for a tasty £84,000 – the case (above) is adorned with a picture of Venice painted by the great tenor himself.

Devon-sent opportunity

Sara Mohr-Pietsch, with whom many of our readers will be familiar as a presenter on Radio 3, has been made the new artistic director of the Dartington International Summer School and Festival, taking over from pianist Joanna MacGregor. Rest assured, however, that when she begins her new job in Devon, Mohr-Pietsch will not be disappearing entirely from the airwaves.

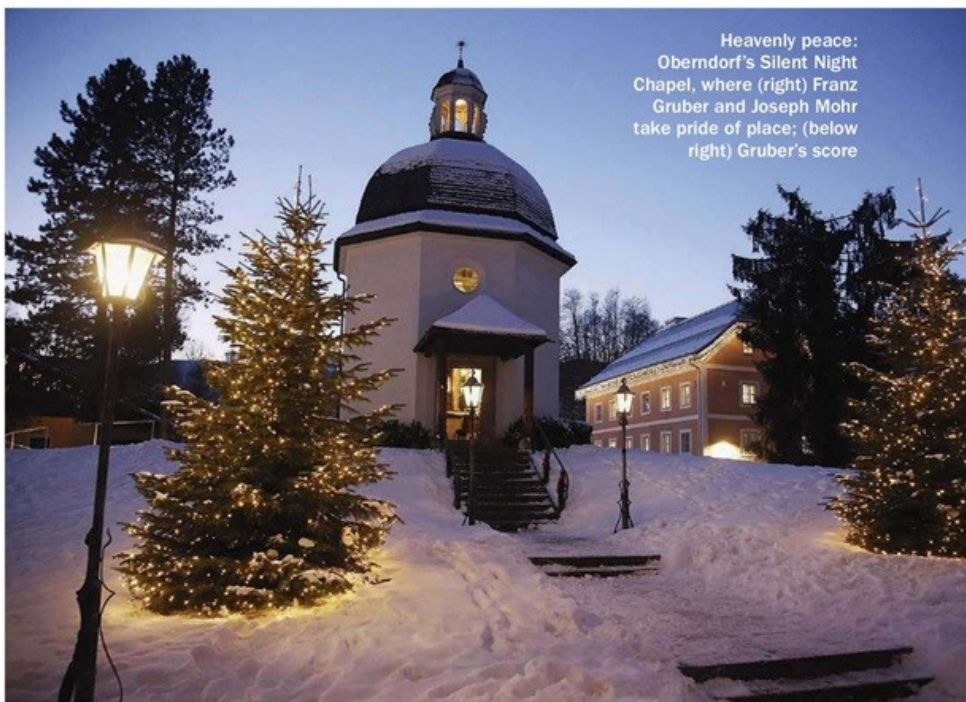
Appy listeners

And talking of radio, late October saw the launch of the new BBC Sounds app. Providing access to over 80,000 hours' worth of audio material, BBC Sounds cleverly adapts itself to each user's listening habits and provides a one-stop shop to the BBC's live and on-demand radio plus podcasts. It can be downloaded from iTunes, Google Play Store and Amazon App Store.

Donkey hooty

With rehearsals for Nativity looming on the horizon, one donkey in Ireland has already made her pitch for a starring role. Unable to bray like her asinine peers, Harriet, who lives in a field somewhere in Galway, instead sings with a high-pitched voice, complete with vibrato – a unique vocal talent that has made her an overnight internet sensation. All hail the Maria Call-ass of the farmyard!

TIMEPIECE This month in history



Heavenly peace: Oberndorf's Silent Night Chapel, where (right) Franz Gruber and Joseph Mohr take pride of place; (below right) Gruber's score

DECEMBER 1818

Silent Night enchants listeners for the first time

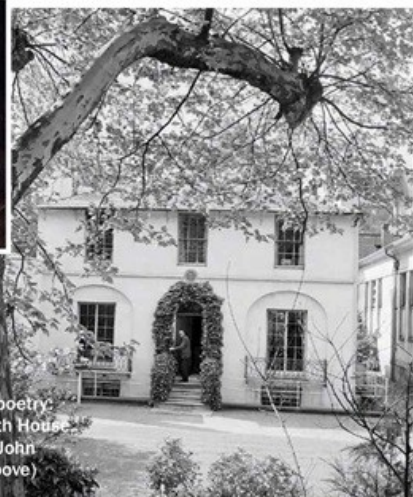
Christmas Eve, 1818. As the congregation of St Nicholas's in Oberndorf was making its way through the snow to attend mass, inside the church, two men were putting the final touches to a carol that they had written that very day. Now they were planning to perform it for the first time.

Father Joseph Mohr, the assistant priest, would sing the tenor solo and provide accompaniment on the guitar. Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolteacher and the church's organist, would sing bass, with the choir joining in at the end of each verse. Restrained and reflective, *Silent Night* was the name of their new addition to the festive repertoire.

Recent years had been tough for the people of Oberndorf, a small town situated on the Salzach river a few miles north of Salzburg. Battered and bruised during the Napoleonic Wars, its spirits

were scarcely lifted by 1816's Congress of Vienna which, in re-drawing the map of Europe, ran the new border between Bavaria and the Hapsburg Empire along the Salzach, ruthlessly splitting the town right down the middle. Telling of a brotherly embrace between people across the world, the words of *Silent Night*'s fourth verse must have struck a chord with those gathered at the church.

As with many a good festive story, the narrative of how *Silent Night* came into being has been embellished and romanticised over time. What we can be fairly sure of is that Mohr wrote the words in 1816 – six verses in all, though just three are usually sung today. And Gruber himself, in a written account from several years later, says that Mohr indeed showed him the text on Christmas Eve 1818, asking if he might be able to set it to music. Gruber got to



Place of poetry:
Wentworth House,
home to John
Keats (above)

Also in December 1818

1st: Following the death of his brother, Tom, from tuberculosis, the poet **John Keats** moves to Wentworth Place, a house near Hampstead Heath owned by his friend Charles Armitage Brown. During his stay there, he goes on to write some of his best-known work, including *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

3rd: **Karl van Beethoven**, the composer's 12-year-old nephew, runs away from his care to be with his mother, Johanna. Appointed sole guardian of Karl after a protracted legal battle with Johanna two years earlier, Beethoven secures his return with help from the police. Karl is then sent to stay for a period at the house of his boarding school master Giannattasio del Rio, where he remains under strict supervision.

10th: The German-born artist **Hubert Maurer** dies in Vienna, aged 80. Best known for his portraits and paintings with either religious or mythological themes, his most famous works include *Circe and Odysseus* and *Moses and the burning bush*. As a teacher at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts for 32 years, he had many distinguished pupils.

25th: Founded in Boston three years previously with the aim of promoting and performing the music of its two eponymous composers, the **Handel and Haydn Society** gives the first ever complete performance of Handel's *The Messiah* in the US. Two months later, the society does likewise with Haydn's *The Creation*.

29th: Armand-Emmanuel de Vignerot du Plessis, the **Duke of Richelieu**, resigns as prime minister of France, ostensibly in response to a refusal by his colleagues to support a change to electoral law. He thus leaves a post he has held with reluctance since succeeding Talleyrand in 1815.

work in double-quick time, presenting Mohr with his efforts just hours later.

Why the last-minute dash? Was it because Mohr had returned from a trip to discover that mice had caused major damage to the church organ, rendering it unplayable? It's a nice tale, though Gruber doesn't confirm it. He does, however, tell us that an organ repairer, Carl Maraucher, later got hold of the score of *Silent Night* while he was working on St Nicholas church's malfunctioning instrument. Maraucher introduced it to audiences in Austria's Tyrol region, from where it was taken up by two famous Austrian singing families, the Rainers and the Strassers, who performed it on tour.

By 1914, *Silent Night* was so familiar across the globe that, when German soldiers sang it in the World War I

trenches, their British counterparts were able to respond in kind. In more peaceful times, singers from Bing Crosby to Mariah Carey and innumerable festive film scores have helped it to retain its spot as arguably the most popular carol ever written.

As for Mohr and Gruber, they have not been entirely forgotten – even

Did Mohr return from a trip to discover that mice had caused damage to the organ?

if, for a while, claims were made that *Silent Night* was the handiwork of Mozart, or possibly Haydn. Head to Oberndorf today, and you will find the Silent Night Museum and the Silent Night Chapel, the latter built in 1937 to provide a fitting tribute after St Nicholas church had fallen victim to regular Salzach floods in the late 19th century. Commemorated in stained glass, complete with quill and guitar, the priest and organist continue to welcome visitors, 200 years after their carol enchanted those who first heard it.

GREAT GIFT IDEAS


COSI FAN TUTTE
MOZART

Royal Opera House

The school for lovers, Mozart's alternative title for *Così fan tutte*, is given a playful, theatrical treatment by German director Jan Philipp Gloger, who sets this new production for The Royal Opera in a theatre. The four lovers are performed by a cast of young rising stars, conducted by Semyon Bychkov.

DVD | BLU-RAY


MADAMA BUTTERFLY
PUCCINI

Royal Opera House

Puccini's Japanese tragedy is given a ravishing production by The Royal Opera. Antonio Pappano, conducts an exceptionally fine cast with the Royal Opera Chorus and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House. Powerful performances show why *Madama Butterfly* remains one of the all-time operatic favourites.

DVD | BLU-RAY


HAMLET
DEAN

Glyndebourne

Bret Dean's colourful, energetic, witty and richly lyrical music expertly captures the modernity of Shakespeare's timeless tale, while also exploiting the traditional operatic elements of arias, ensembles and choruses. The artists include Allan Clayton, Sarah Connolly and Barbara Hannigan, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski.

DVD | BLU-RAY


A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's Globe

Fusing music dance and some serious comedy, Emma Rice's first production as Artistic Director brings the Dream crashing into the Globe's magical setting. Naughty, tender, transgressive and surprising, it is truly a festival of theatre. Meow Meow plays the mischievous fairy queen Titania.

DVD


TWELFTH NIGHT
SHAKESPEARE

Royal Shakespeare Company

Twins are separated in a shipwreck and forced to fend for themselves in a strange land. The first twin, Viola, falls in love with Orsino, who dotes on Olivia, who falls for Viola but is idolised by Malvolio. Enter Sebastian, who is the spitting image of his twin sister... *Twelfth Night* is a tale of unrequited love - hilarious and heartbreaking.

DVD


ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND
TALBOT

Royal Opera House

The Royal Ballet's Christopher Wheeldon magically captured the twists and turns of Lewis Carroll's classic story. Joby Talbot's original score is full of sweeping melodies and contemporary sounds. Lauren Cuthbertson stars as the inquisitive Alice, along with Federico Bonelli, Steven McRae, and Laura Morera in the lead roles.

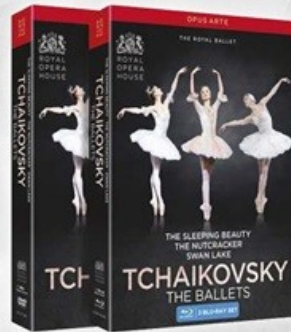
DVD | BLU-RAY


THE NUTCRACKER
TCHAIKOVSKY

Royal Opera House

The Nutcracker is the quintessential Christmas ballet. Lauren Cuthbertson and Federico Bonelli dance the exquisite Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince; Francesca Hayward and Alexander Campbell take the roles of Clara and the Nutcracker; and Gary Avis is the mysterious, kindly Drosselmeyer.

DVD | BLU-RAY


TCHAIKOVSKY THE BALLETS

Royal Opera House

This special collection includes three Royal Ballet performances masterpieces: Anthony Dowell's majestic production of the beautiful and romantic tragedy *Swan Lake*; *The Sleeping Beauty* in its detailed re-creation by Monica Mason of and Peter Wright's classic production of the quintessential Christmas ballet, *The Nutcracker*.

3 DVD | 3 BLU-RAY SET



Today's musicians prefer the fast lane, say labels

Classical music is getting faster. Or so say Deutsche Grammophon and Decca who, having compared recordings of JS Bach made in the 1960s with current ones, reveal that the former are around 30 per cent longer than the latter – the park in which maestros such as Otto Klemperer once took luxurious

strolls is, it seems, now thronging with period instrument specialists such as Roger Norrington enjoying a high-octane work-out. Former Radio 3 controller Nicholas Kenyon puts it down to 'a basic change in taste', as listeners discard heavier styles of yore for 'something more light, airy and flexible.'

DÉJÀ VU

History just keeps on repeating itself...



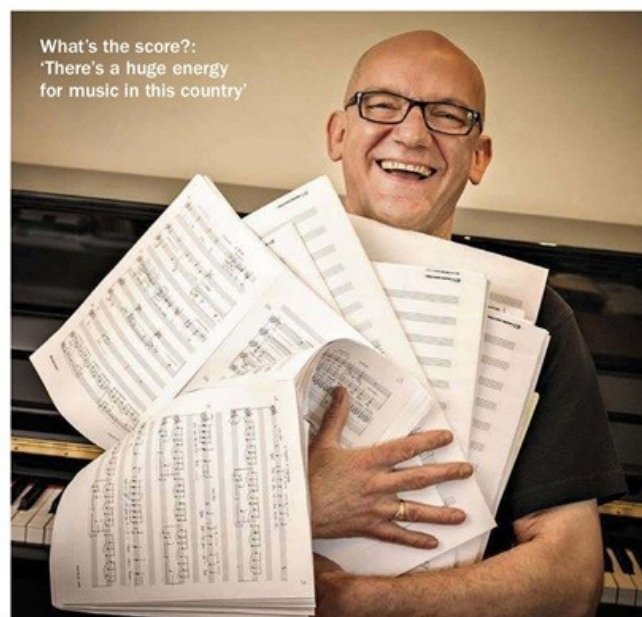
Who wants a bland 'beep' telling you to fasten your seat-belt? Not Lincoln car drivers, we're told. For its new Aviator SUV range, the motor manufacturers invited three Detroit Symphony Orchestra musicians to compose, play and record the tunes to be used in the cars' warning systems, ranging from a 'hard warning' played on the marimba to a violin-based 'non-critical alert'. Great idea, but it's by no means the first time

that music has been used as a means to provide an alert...

From **Roman** times, when *cornua* (horns) were played to instruct troops to attack or retreat, brass instruments continued to play a role in battle, their tunes growing in complexity – when **Haydn** visited London in the 1790s, he noted some of them down and quoted one in his 'Military' Symphony No. 100. It was during World War II, meanwhile, that the BBC introduced its *Into Battle* radio programme with *Lillibulero*, a tune that was later used as the 'interval signal' to alert listeners that they'd found the right point on the dial while no transmissions were on air. Talking of intervals, concert halls and opera houses today are increasingly using music to recall audiences back from the bar – not least the **Royal Opera House**, which commissions young composers to write tunes specifically for that purpose. And let's not forget the home. Owners of various Samsung washing machines have become accustomed to hearing **Schubert's** *Trout* Quintet letting them know that their clothes are washed, spun and ready to hang out... and hopefully not smelling of fish.

MEET THE COMPOSER

Bob Chilcott



What's the score?:
'There's a huge energy
for music in this country'

Bob Chilcott began his professional composing career in 1997, after 12 years as a member of the King's Singers. He has written for choirs of all shapes and sizes, for both children and adults. This Christmas he conducts the Huddersfield Choral Society and joins up with John Rutter for BBC Singers concerts at Milton Court and Saffron Hall.

I was lucky enough to have a really great musical education.

I came from a time when post-War parents wanted a better life for their kids than they had. My family had no money but I got the chance to go to a choir school. And I had a really decent career as a performer. I now want to invest my time in getting people to understand that music is a wonderful thing.

We are brilliant at outreach programmes in the UK. I think we're one of the only countries in the world that does it to the extent we do. I was involved with the BBC Singers when outreach was just being thought about, and it seems like ages ago. All over the country orchestras and choir are doing a huge amount of work, and it's vital because there's not been that example elsewhere.

Music has gone out of the picture for a lot of people. There used to be a real understanding of the idiom of contemporary music. We don't see the importance of investing in the idea of what it is to learn a culture and become

part of your own culture. It's a shame it's not seen as being important in education. There's a huge energy for music in this country but there's a kind of discourse in general life that music isn't for many people. **I've just written a Christmas Oratorio for the Three Choirs Festival next year.** I wrote a *St John Passion* a few years ago for Gloucester Cathedral, and for that I wrote new hymn settings of well-known words, like chorales. I've done that with this piece as well. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* is a magnificent work and I love that it was a very functional piece in its time.

My favourite carols are O Holy Night and John Rutter's What Sweeter Music. When you hear the Rutter you think everything is alright. I took part in BBC Radio 4's programme *Soul Music* about *O Holy Night*. There's something very special about it. I said to Rutter that I loved his choral arrangement of it, and he said he can't stand the piece, which made me laugh. I love it.

StudioSecrets



Alice strings: violinist Matthew Trusler

We reveal who's recording what, and where...

Orchid Classics has released a single in aid of the Lenny Trusler Children's Foundation. 'From a Fairy to a Child' was written by Jools Holland as part of **Matthew Trusler** and Ashley Wass's 2015 *Wonderland* project – celebrating 150 years of Lewis Carroll's first *Alice* story – but was set aside until this year. Arranged by Carl Davis, it has been recorded by Trusler, Wass and members of the Paris Opera to mark the charity's tenth anniversary. Download it at lfcf.co.uk.

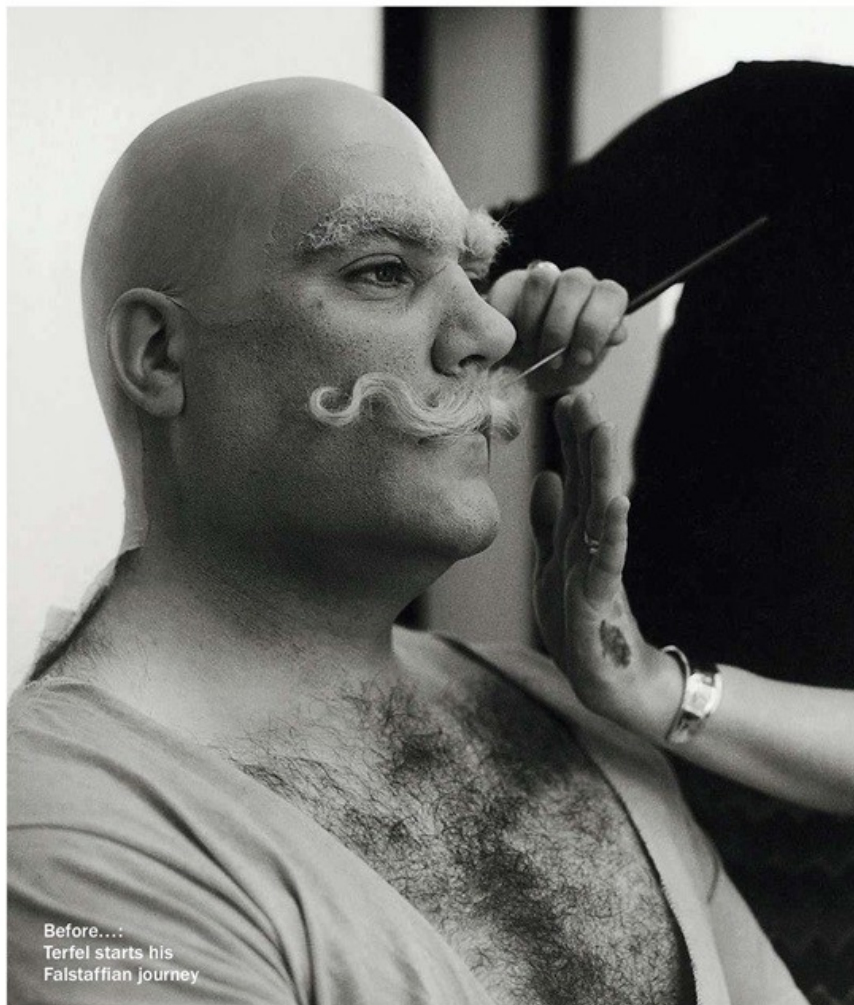
Florilegium and violinist **Rachel Podger** have been working on separate projects for Channel Classics. Podger has recorded a version of JS Bach's Cello Suites at the Royal Academy of Music, while *Florilegium* has laid down pieces by CPE Bach, Benda, Graun and Fasch at St Michael's Church, Highgate.

Fretwork have recorded consort works by Thomas Lupo for Signum Classics, and both Thomas Adès and Alessio Bax will take to the piano for the label, in London and Snape Maltings respectively. Adès, a fine pianist as well as a composer, is reportedly working on an album of Janáček solo works.

An old cassette tape recording by the late composer and pianist **John McCabe** has been found, remastered and will be released on Divine Art in the spring. McCabe recorded contemporary piano works by Australian, American and British composers in 1985.

There's a wealth of Mahler on its way, thanks to Valery Gergiev and the **Munich Philharmonic**. The Eighth Symphony was captured at the orchestra's 125th-anniversary concert in October with the First recorded the following month. They move on to Lieder recordings – featuring Anna Lucia Richter and Anja Harteros – in December and April. Mahler is on the menu, too, for BIS Records as November saw the recording of his Seventh Symphony by the **Minnesota Orchestra** under Osmo Vänskä.

SHEILA ROCK, MARCO BORGAREVE



Before...: Terfel starts his Falstaffian journey



REWIND

Great artists talk about their past recordings

This month: **BRYN TERFEL** *bass-baritone*

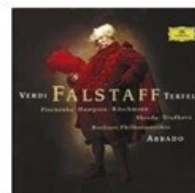
MY FINEST MOMENT

Verdi *Falstaff*

Bryn Terfel (bass-baritone), Thomas Hampson (baritone), Adrienne Pieczonka (soprano); Berlin Philharmonic/Claudio Abbado (2001)

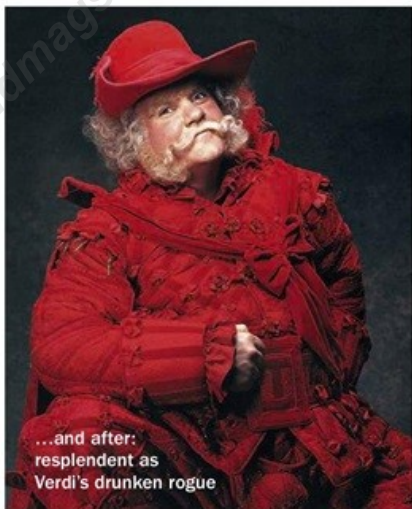
Deutsche Grammophon 471 1942

The recording of *Falstaff* in Berlin, with the Berlin Philharmonic and Claudio Abbado, was tinged with sadness. It was Abbado's kind of 'comeback' recording after he'd had multiple surgeries due to illness. In those five days, he was on incredible form; we had just done six



performances at the Easter Festival and transferred it to a concert version in Berlin, and then the recording of the piece. This, for

me, was monumental because it was a role that Sir Geraint Evans had sung; the baton was kind of passed to another Welsh singer to sing this iconic role. One of those evenings we had free and we were all invited to the opera house to hear Giuseppe Sinopoli conduct *Aida*.



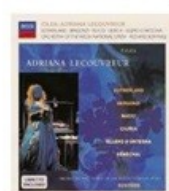
That was the fateful night where he had a heart attack in the pit and died just before the Nile scene. I was sitting with Thomas Hampson, and Sinopoli's wife was in front of me; as you can imagine it was a terrible shock for us all. We had another four days of finishing off the recording, but you have to carry on. But I am so incredibly happy to have recorded it with Claudio Abbado. It's my only recording of *Falstaff*, and one I'm incredibly proud of.

MY FONDEST MEMORY

Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur

Joan Sutherland (soprano), Carlo Bergonzi (tenor), Leo Nucci (baritone); Orchestra of Welsh National Opera/Richard Bonyng Decca 475 7906 (1990)

Having done the Cardiff Singer of the World in 1989 these little invitations came through, which I was so chuffed about. There was a recording by the Welsh National Opera of a very small role called 'Quinault' in *Adriana Lecouvreur*. I read who was involved and it said 'Richard Bonyng'; I thought 'I know that name, he's usually connected



to Dame Joan Sutherland', and then I read who would be playing 'Adriana' and it was Dame Joan Sutherland! Then

I thought that Pavarotti is usually connected with Sutherland; I read who the tenor was, and it was Luciano Pavarotti! We were all to stay on the Gower Peninsula in a hotel called the Fairyhill and I remember I was very

nervous. I went to the garden with my suitcase and there was Dame Joan, Luciano Pavarotti and Richard Bonyng drinking tea; she poured me a cup. So, that was my initiation into the world of classical music. Luciano subsequently left the recording and Carlo Bergonzi came in. Brangwyn Hall is a beautiful hall to sing in, and I'll never forget listening to Luciano warming up before the sessions. It was an interesting facet of what was to come in my recording career – knowing where to stand, where the microphone was. I'm so grateful to the Welsh National Opera; it was absolutely amazing.

I'D LIKE ANOTHER GO AT...

Fauré Requiem

Cecilia Bartoli (mezzo), Bryn Terfel (bass-baritone); Orchestra & Chorus of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia/Myung-Whun Chung DG 459 3652 (1998)

We were to record the Duruflé Requiem, the Fauré Requiem and also a disc between me and Cecilia Bartoli and I remember I got to Rome not feeling 100 per cent, knowing that I had five days of recording. You want to be at the height of your powers, vocally, when you're doing these kinds of recordings; you might be recording

in the morning, you might be recording in the evening or the afternoon, so you have to be on the case and you're praying that you keep away from illness. I knew I was struggling, and I struggled through the recording of every piece. I should have gone home but I was young and enthusiastic; I was thinking 'I can plough my way through this'. Incredibly, you can't hear on these recordings how much I was struggling; somehow adrenaline carried me through. People knew in the studio, so maybe they pulled a stop here and changed a microphone there, but I would undoubtedly like another chance, especially the Fauré Requiem. It's minimal work for the baritone, of course, but there are two incredibly beautiful movements – the *Ostia* and the *Libera Me*. I was young, naïve and a bit wet behind the ears; once you start sweating on the recording platform it's not a good sign.



Buried Treasure



Violinist **Baiba Skride** introduces us to three rarities from her record collection

Arriaga String Quartet No. 3

Melos String Quartet

SWR 10282

The Spanish composer Arriaga died really young – he was only 19. This quartet is sophisticated and beautiful. It makes you wonder, if he had lived a bit longer, what kind of pieces he would have written, or how his music would have come to life. I was



searching Spotify for some new things and I thought 'wow, this is incredible'. In the Third Quartet he uses *tremolo* to portray a storm; it's very cleverly written –

like a mixture between Mozart and Schubert – but the sound is fresh. It's very classical, but with his own language.

Erdmann Symphony No. 1

Saarbrücken Radio Symphony

Orchestra/Israel Yinon

Koch-Swann 3-6572-2

Eduard Erdmann was born in Latvia, but taught in Germany and died in Hamburg. He has an amazing range of compositions including a solo violin sonata, which is how I came upon him. It's modern, complex music,



but it has a beautiful symphonic language. Erdmann left his teaching post in Cologne because he didn't agree with what the Germans were doing. It affected

him, and his later compositions are much darker, particularly his Symphony No. 4.

Rózsa Sinfonia Concertante

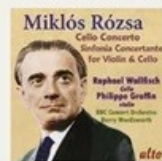
Raphael Wallfisch (cello), Philippe

Graffin (violin); BBC Concert

Orchestra/Barry Wordsworth

Alto ALC 1274

Rózsa's *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin and Cello is wonderful. There's a beautiful second movement, which is a theme with variations and portrays the cello part so well. It has such beautiful melodies, is full of energy and – like his Violin Concerto – he was influenced by his film music-



making. If you look at his film music, its masterfulness has nothing to do with whether it was used for film or not. He was a fan of Bartók and you can

hear the Hungarian influences, but he's such an incredible composer.

Baiba Skride performs on a new album of works by Heino Eller, out now on Ondine

Can music be 'fast' or 'slow'?



How does music fit in with our perceptions of speed? **Tom Service** and composer Anna Meredith take a short ride on a fast machine to find out

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

The idea of speed in music makes sense, doesn't it? We know that some music is faster than others, which is why the *prestissimo* finales of classical symphonies and Rossini's operas create such fizzing momentum. This is fast music, as the crotchets and quavers fly by, as opposed to the slow pace of a Bruckner *adagio* or one of Mahler's farewells to life, in which the pulse of the music is so drawn-out as to be almost imperceptible.

And yet, speed in music is really an illusion. At the most fundamental level, there is no difference between the music we call 'fast' and the music we say is 'slow'. Whether it's pulsing at 160 beats per minute (the kind of speed that the DJs of Ibiza get to at the end of their sets, roughly the tempo of the Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture*) or 40bpm (the etiolated slowness of the Prelude to Wagner's *Parsifal*), all of this music is moving through the air in soundwaves at exactly the same speed: the speed of sound is dependent on environmental conditions, but in a concert hall at around 20 degrees Celsius, soundwaves move at around 767 miles an hour.

So when composers are manipulating this sense of speed, they're playing with an illusion, they're sculpting our perception of time for the duration of their track, their symphony, their opera. The mystery is that the illusion feels real to us when we're listening, or when we're dancing. They turn these pulsing soundwaves into physical sensation.

But to really put the physics of speed into perspective, the composer



Anna Meredith and I needed to ride the rollercoasters of Thorpe Park. Obviously. For Anna, rollercoasters are lessons in how to structure and sculpt the experience of speed: each ride is a couple of minutes of exquisitely calibrated barrel-rolls and inversions,

Rollercoasters are lessons in how to structure and sculpt the experience of speed

speedings-up and slowings-down, all based on the laws of gravity that drive the entire experience. What goes up – as the carriages crank up to the top of the hill, and your heart and stomach seem to leave your body before your lungs fill with an involuntary scream of joy and fear as you plummet towards the ground – must come down. Anna Meredith wants her music to have

the same irresistible power that one of the rides of Thorpe Park does, and in her *Five Telegrams*, composed for the opening of this year's BBC Proms season, and her album *Varmints*, full of majestic banging tunes, it really does.

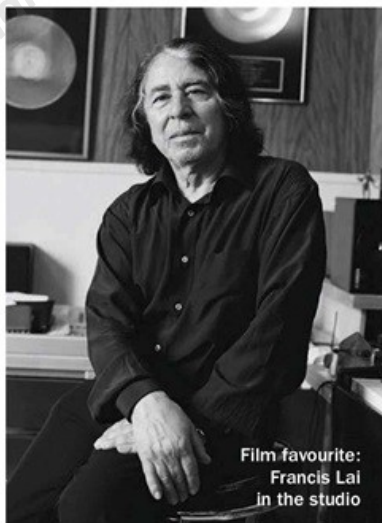
She's not alone: Sibelius becomes a compositional time-lord in his Fifth Symphony, in which the second half of the first movement is one of music's longest, most powerful speedings-up; there are the violently fast experiments of Speedcore, dance-music that pushes music to *prestissimo* and beyond; and there's Beethoven. For his Tenth Symphony, he dreamt of creating a 'new gravitational force' in music with new kinds of speed and time. Beethoven, I'm sure, would have loved Thorpe Park. ☺

BBC
RADIO



Tom Service explores how music works in *The Listening Service* on Sundays at 5pm

FAREWELL TO...



Film favourite:
Francis Lai
in the studio

Francis Lai

Born 1932 *Composer*

Francis Lai won fame as one of France's best-loved film composers, whose score for *Love Story* in 1970 won him an Academy Award. After formative years performing as a pianist and accordionist in orchestras in and around his native Nice, Lai found work as an accompanist in Marseilles. There he discovered jazz and the chanteuse Claude Goaty, whom he followed to Paris where his song writing career took flight. Living and working among

Montmartre's artistic milieu, Lai wrote the first of some 600 songs, and went on to become accompanist to the legendary Edith Piaf, for whom he would pen *C'était pas moi*, among others. He also encountered film director Claude Lelouch, the pair forming an indomitable partnership that continued right until Lai's death. Composing music for films became a fruitful creative outlet for Lai, who would win a Golden Globe for his first Lelouch score – *Un homme et une femme* (1966). Soon in demand as a composer, Lai worked on a string of French, UK and US productions for directors such as Michael Winner, René Clément, Terence Young and Arthur Hiller. It was for Hiller that he created the score that would win him an Oscar, along with a second Golden Globe. *Love Story*'s poignantly romantic theme also became a chart success across the globe.



Roy Hargrove Born 1969 *Jazz trumpeter*

As influential as he was experimental, Roy Hargrove (pictured left in 1996) inspired a legion of fans, not least as the bandleader of his progressive RH Factor group. Though primarily associated with hard bop, he excelled across a range of styles, and enjoyed collaborations with leading jazz musicians such as fellow trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and saxophonist Sonny Rollins. Born in Waco, Texas, Hargrove was discovered by Marsalis while at college in

Dallas. From there, he moved first to Boston to study at the Berklee College of Music, then to New York where he continued his studies at the New School. In 1990 he released *Diamond in the Rough*, the first of many albums. Two of those discs would win Grammy Awards: 1998's *Habana*, recorded with Crisol, his Afro-Cuban band; and, in 2002, *Directions in Music: Live at Massey Hall*, whose other participants included keyboardist Herbie Hancock.

Also remembered...

Along with Edward Greenfield and Robert Layton, the critic **Ivan March** (born 1927) co-founded and co-wrote the esteemed publication *The Penguin Stereo Record Guide* which later became *The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs*. He reviewed for a number of other publications, including *Cassettes and Cartridges* and *Gramophone* magazines.

As head of music at BBC Scotland from 1972-91, **Martin Dalby** (born 1942) proved an invaluable champion of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, arguably even saving it from possible closure. He was also a fine composer, whose music was performed at the BBC Proms and regularly at the St Magnus Festival in Orkney.

ORA SINGERS
SUZY DIGBY

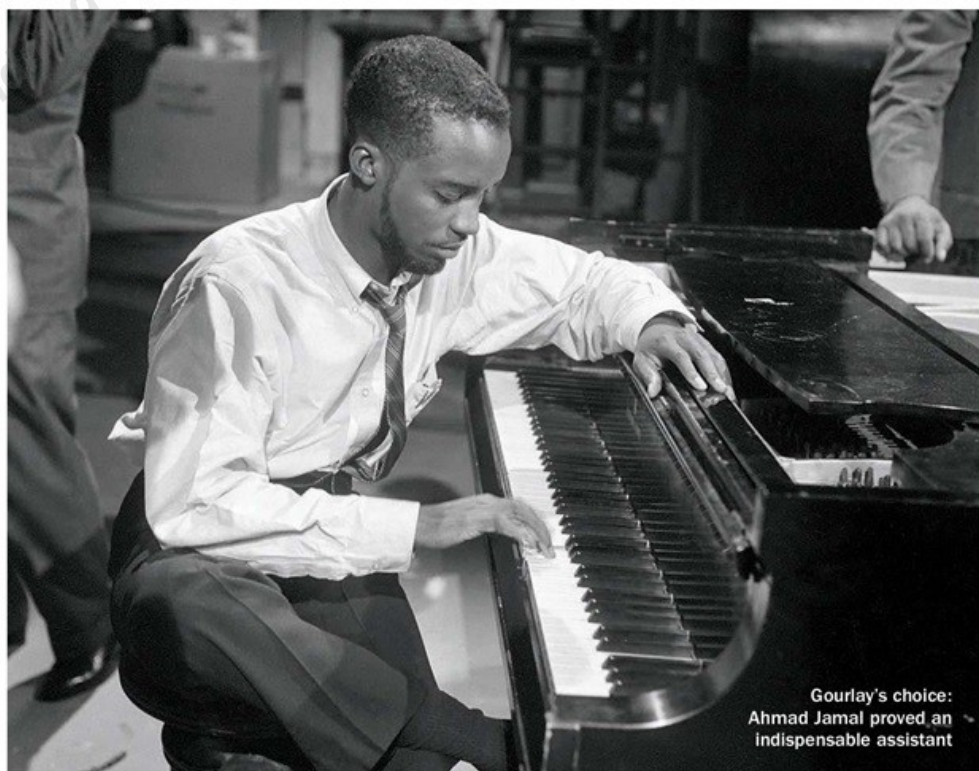
THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS
ORA SINGERS

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

PURELAND
FOUNDATION

harmoniamundi.com

Photos: Nick Rutter
HMM 905305



Gourlay's choice:
Ahmad Jamal proved an
indispensable assistant

lot of potential there for opening up new musical avenues – though they're a fairly standard jazz trio line-up, their use of electronica spreads out into hip hop and other styles.

And also... I wasn't sure I'd enjoy **John Carreyrou's** *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* but I'd read some good reviews so gave it a go. It is a totally compelling book and tells the most extraordinary real-life current affairs story that most people know nothing about. I won't give anything away, but it's well worth a read.

Andrew Gourlay and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León's new disc of *Rachmaninov* will be reviewed in a future issue

Karen Cargill mezzo-soprano



The guitarist **Sean Shibe** is a great friend of mine and my husband's, and we've known him since he was quite

young. His new album *softLOUD* is like a full meal: it opens with small vignettes of Scottish tunes and closes with an extraordinary work for nine bagpipes. I love dance music and this track reminds me of that genre – it makes me feel like I'm reliving my youth! Sean is so sure of himself as an artist, and this is a fascinating piece of work.

I always return to **JS Bach**. My go-to recording is countertenor **Andreas Scholl's** disc of Bach cantatas, conducted by **Philippe Herreweghe**. It's a palate cleanser – it's so clean. It can be hectic travelling around as a musician, and listening to this recording helps me take a moment for everything to align. Scholl's voice was what made me fall in love with countertenors.

Kamasi Washington's album *Heaven and Earth* is the ideal bridge for me, because he crosses so many different styles: it's jazz, but sounds a lot like funk, and he uses a lot of retro '70s and hip hop sounds. I'm a latecomer to



Music to my ears

What the classical world has been listening to this month

Andrew Gourlay conductor



In the summer, I went to the Berlin Philharmonic's BBC Prom of **Richard Strauss's** *Don Juan* and *Death*

and *Transfiguration*, and **Beethoven's** Seventh Symphony, conducted by **Kirill Petrenko**. It was the first time I'd seen Petrenko, and I have to say I was hugely impressed by the warmth and purity of his conducting and, of course, by the extraordinary quality of the orchestra in this repertoire. I came away from it feeling so positive.

An album I've had going round on a loop for months now is **Ahmad Jamal's** 1958 *At the Pershing: But Not for Me*. It's an incredibly uplifting disc and I find that his solos on all of the

tracks convey the sheer fun and enjoyment that he seems to get from playing. I've recently moved house, and it has kept me relatively sane while I've been shifting boxes and unpacking all sorts of heavy items!

Ahmad Jamal has kept me sane while I've been shifting boxes and unpacking

My most recent discovery is **Vels Trio**, a UK-based band that sits in a cross-genre space within the jazz world. I've been particularly enjoying their *Yellow Ochre* EP – it was the wild climax of the track called 'Godzilla' that first drew me in. They're quite a young band, and I think there's a

READER CHOICE

Clare Orrell, Liverpool

Travelling home from work as a primary school headteacher, I listen to downloaded music on my phone. Leading up to the centenary of Armistice Day, it simply had to be **Vaughan Williams's** (below) *A Pastoral Symphony*, evoking the war-torn fields of Flanders, the desolation and the poignant bugle sounds.



jazz – I just didn't understand its structure. It all changed when I went to see Joe Locke, the jazz vibraphonist, in New York. I was completely taken over by the genre, and it was so exciting to be carried along with what they were playing.

And also... When I was in Madrid recently, my husband and I took our son to a **flamenco** performance. He comes to my concerts, but thinks of it as the thing that takes his mum away from home, so we're trying to find new ways of introducing him to music. He was mesmerised by the guitarists. It was a thrilling atmosphere, with such visceral singing. We were so high when we left.

Karen Cargill sings in Berlioz's L'enfance du Christ at the Barbican, 17 December. See p68

Thibaut Garcia guitarist



Because I've recently recorded a disc of **JS Bach**, I've been immersing myself in his musical world. One

album that I really like is the Pygmalion ensemble's spectacular recording of his

Missae Breves. Though I am not a religious believer, when I hear this music I find it not only very powerful but also very touching – whenever I listen to it, I have goosebumps within 20 seconds and they stay with me throughout the whole disc.

Another superb **Bach** disc is pianist Maria João Pires's recording of the French Suite No. 2 in C minor. She plays it with incredible elegance, but what I particularly like about her performance is that she takes the time to listen to and enjoy every single note and to



Elegance itself: pianist Maria João Pires

READER CHOICE



Roz Trubger, Dorset

The pioneering use of Norwegian folk music by **Halfdan Kjerulf**, (above) who died 150 years ago, significantly influenced Grieg, and his seldom played songs (often reminiscent of Schumann) are skilful, delicate gems of intense feeling. Some of his songs have been bound into a song-cycle reflecting his tragic love affair, and published as *Hjertesorg*. I recommend 'Synnoeves Sang', 'Die Schwester' and 'Spanische Romanze', sung by soprano Isa Katharina Gericke.

say things about the music. This is quite a rare quality, but so admirable. With the vocal aspect of Pygmalion's recording and the instrumental aspect of this one, I enjoy two different sides of Bach.

Webern is a composer who didn't write for the guitar, so I've never been that familiar with his music. His *Langsamer Satz* is a piece that I discovered relatively recently at a concert given by the Arod Quartet, and I fell in love with it – it is very moving, with a warm, woody texture. It's a very interesting work. The Arod Quartet haven't recorded it yet, so I have been listening to the disc by the Diotima Quartet which is wonderfully expressive.

And also... Ever since I studied in Paris, I've been very interested in contemporary dance. I recently saw *Rosas Danst Rosas* by the Belgian choreographer **Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker** and it was absolutely incredible. One thing I find fascinating about dance is how the use of certain lighting can create a different feel – I think classical music could learn from this.

Thibaut Garcia's new disc, 'Bach Inspirations', will be reviewed next month

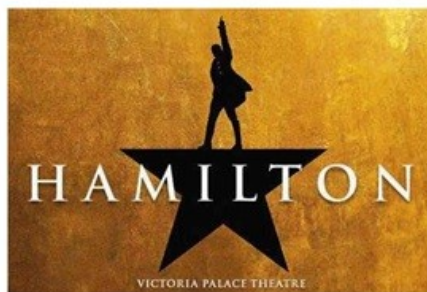
Our Choices The BBC Music Magazine team's current favourites

Oliver Condy Editor

This year's **Bristol Keyboard Festival** at St George's attracted some mightily fine performances – harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani entertained us with his on-stage patter almost as much as he did with his astonishing Bach playing; and the winner of the Leeds Piano Competition, Eric Lu, flew in specially from the US for a spine-tingling performance of Schubert and Chopin. A week of riches indeed.

Jeremy Pound Deputy editor

As the year trundles towards its conclusion and the weather theoretically turns colder, the BBC Philharmonic's new recording of **Holst's A Winter Idyll** seems a good place to turn. Holst captures all manner of hibernal elements in this symphonic poem, from swirling winds that remind me a little of Bax's *November Woods* to the dank darkness of a December night and a jolly session in warm Gloucestershire pub. Cheers!



Rebecca Franks Managing editor

It was very moving to hear **Britten's War Requiem** in Liverpool Cathedral on the weekend of the Armistice centenary, with musicians from Liverpool and Hanover joining forces. As well as the poignant symbolism, what particularly struck me was the brilliance of the tenor and baritone soloists, Ed Lyon and Benjamin Appl, who vividly brought to life Wilfred Owen's poetry.

Michael Beek Reviews editor

I recently attended a special pre-concert event in London at which the British composer **Rodney Newton** spoke. I was curious to listen to his music when I returned home and I am so glad I did, as Newton knows a thing or two about melody and is such a musical storyteller. The symphonies I tried – Nos 1 and 4, performed by the Malaga Symphony Orchestra – have left me wanting to discover more.

Freya Parr Editorial assistant

My month has been musical theatre-heavy, with trips to Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss's **SIX**, about the wives of Henry VIII, and **Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton**, the blockbuster hip hop musical about the Founding Fathers of America. Eclecticism has had its benefits, and remixes of 'Greensleeves' and raps about Thomas Jefferson are proving the perfect accompaniment to evenings with egg-nogs and mince pies.

Valery Gergiev / Kent Nagano / Matthias Goerne / Leif-Ove Ansdnes
Jonathan Nott / Kazushi Ono / Jean Yves Thibaudet / Bejun Mehta / Irene Théorin
Lluís Vilamajó / Tabea Zimmermann / Jean Guihen Queyras / Orfeó Català
Barcelona Symphony Orchestra / Josep Pons / Diana Damrau / Rias Kammerchor
Daniil Trifonov / Grigory Sokolov



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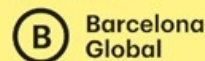
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Richard Morrison

Why do amateur choirs insist on singing bad pop arrangements?

As you hit that Great Barrier Reef of washed-up regrets known as middle age, a horrible temptation looms. It's to try getting 'down with the kids' by adopting fashions that are absurdly inappropriate for your spreading girth and creaking knees. There can be only one result. Self-inflicted humiliation.

I sometimes feel that about choirs as well as people. The great British choral tradition is overwhelmingly amateur, and nobody is prouder of its quality than I am. It has consumed many of my waking hours for more than 50 years. Its enduring strength means that – unlike in France and Italy, for instance – our historic churches still resonate each Sunday to the sound of polyphony, rather than a tone-deaf cleric crooning infantile refrains into a microphone.

It means that the great choral masterpieces – from Machaut to MacMillan – can be enjoyed far more regularly here than in countries where there are mainly only professional choruses. And, of course, the weekly choir rehearsal gives many thousands of us hardworking adults the sort of physical and spiritual lift that might just keep us sane and happy.

In short, singing in a choir is probably the finest hobby you can have without taking your vest off. But if I could suggest one way to improve on this delectation, it would be a law preventing choirs from struggling through someone's lumbering, cool-as-your-grandad's-cardigan choral arrangement of a (probably at least five years out-of-date) pop or rock song.

I write as someone who recently stumbled upon a ladies barbershop choir doing a rendition of that South Korean mega-hit, 'Gangnam Style',

replete with hand jives, knee bends, and harmonies so approximate that I wondered whether, like the music of John Cage, they were based on chance elements derived from the Chinese book of I-Ching. Full marks to the ladies for enthusiasm and recklessness, but *nul points* – as they say on the Eurovision – for an accurate assessment of their own technical and cross-cultural capabilities.

They are far from being lone culprits. When Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry declared that a man's gotta know his limitations, I'm sure he meant to add 'and

I recently stumbled across a barbershop choir doing a rendition of 'Gangnam Style'

so do non-sightreading second altos with a range of half an octave and a hankering to sing the greatest hits of Celine Dion in close-harmony'. And lest I come across as misogynistic old reactionary by picking on the women, let me add that life holds few terrors more petrifying than a male-voice choir following Sam Smith into the stratospheric heights of 'I'm Not the Only One'.

Why do they all do it? Two reasons, I guess – both wrong. The first, to which I'm slightly more sympathetic, is that choral singers enjoy pop ballads and rock belters as much as anyone else and don't see why they shouldn't have a go themselves. But really they shouldn't. Most successful pop songs are performed by people with very good voices backed up by the finest

instrumentalists and computer enhancement that money can buy. For a local community choir to attempt to emulate that is bit like trying to build a NASA space rocket in your back garden.

Or, secondly, the choir director thinks that by tackling pop material, the choir will seem more hip'n'happenin'. Wrong again! The result will be like watching your dad do the YMCA dance moves at a wedding. And believe me, I've been that dad and got the emotional scars from my children's derision to show for it.

It's easy to blame choir-master-superstar Gareth Malone for this trend, but there are mitigating circumstances. Gareth sprang to TV glory by doing remarkable work with disaffected pupils in tough schools. In such circumstances, any repertoire that motivates stropky teens is allowable. Adults, however, can access such a wealth of fine music that's actually been written for choirs, that sounds great sung by amateurs, and that sets technical challenges which can actually be achieved.

So the next time your choir feels the urge to launch into the collected oeuvre of Ariana Grande, ask yourself these questions. Does the result sound good to you? Does it sound remotely like how it sounds on the radio? Are audience members wearing the fixed grins of passengers trapped on the same bus as a gibbering drunk? And do your loved ones laugh uneasily when you ask them afterwards if they enjoyed it?

Choral singing can be many things beginning with 'e' – exhilarating, elegant, educational, ethereal, entertaining, expressive, epic. But the one 'e' it should never be is embarrassing. ☺

Richard Morrison is a columnist of The Times and its chief music critic



The Christmas Quiz

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me... 30 festive-themed questions to answer!



Loving angels:
Robbie Williams
...and who?
(Question 28)



Nightly song:
Kristine Opolais as
Dvořák's Rusalka
(Question 17)

Christmas is coming...

1. Who began composing *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, his concerto for percussion and orchestra, on the first Sunday of Advent in 1991?
2. Which choir's Advent Carol Service is traditionally broadcast on BBC Radio 3 every year?
3. In whose 1895 opera *Christmas Eve* does the blacksmith Vakula hare off last-minute to St Petersburg in the quest for a pair of boots?
4. Whose 1926 masque *On Christmas Night* was written to accompany a ballet based on Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*?
5. Which eponymous 1892 opera character, having shot himself in his study on Christmas Night, dies to the sound of children singing 'Noël'?

Remember the date

Which works commonly associated with Christmas were first performed on the following dates?

6. 13 April 1742, The Great Music Hall, Fishamble Street, Dublin
7. 25 December 1734 – 6 January 1735, St Thomas and St Nicholas churches, Leipzig
8. 18 December 1892, Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg
9. 1 February 1896, Teatro Regio, Turin
10. 5 December 1942 in the library at Norwich Castle (first version) and 4 December 1943 at Wigmore Hall, London (completed version)

Let it snow

Four composers have made their way into our wintry scene (above right). Can you name them?

Questions 11. to 14.

Name that tune

15. In which famous aria from Dvořák's opera *Rusalka* does the eponymous heroine declare to its addressee her love for the Prince?
16. Name the dramatic Old Testament-based cantata by William Walton that was first performed at the Leeds Festival on 8 October 1931?



17. By what seasonal nickname is Tchaikovsky's First Symphony often referred to?

18. Which 1867 tone poem by Musorgsky was later arranged by Leopold Stokowski (pictured below) for the 1940 Walt Disney film *Fantasia*?

19. One word from each of the four answers from Questions 15–18 appears in the first verse of a well-known carol. What is the carol in question?

Put the decorations up

20. How many 'la's are sung by the top line in the first verse of *Deck the Halls* (no 'fa's, please...)?

21. Where might you traditionally hear the tune to 'O Christmas Tree' ('O

Tannenbaum') sung by a gathering of thousands on a Wednesday afternoon in late-September/early October every year?

22. Whose Shakespeare-inspired masque *The Fairy Queen* was first performed in London on 2 May 1692?

23. The Shaker song *Simple Gifts* plays a prominent role in which Copland ballet?

24. What is the correct title of the carol that begins with the line 'Now the holly bears a berry...?'

Looking back...

25. Where was Spanish soprano Sabina Puértolas at the beginning of 2018 when she unexpectedly received a call from the Royal Opera House urgently asking her to come and sing the part of Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*?

26. In April, London's Kings Place staged *Slow Pixel*, an audio-visual work performed by 176 of what type of creature?

27. On 1 May 2018, which famous vocal group celebrated the 50th anniversary of its first professional performance?

28. Can you name the Russian soprano who duetted with singer Robbie Williams at the opening of the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Moscow?

29. Who returned after an absence of 18 years to conduct his 12th Last Night of the Proms in September?

30. Which Catalan operatic superstar died at the age of 85 on 6 October?

How do you think you did? Are you a shining star or perhaps a bit of a Christmas pudding? Turn to page 120 for the answers



Reign of King's

The 100th anniversary of King's College, Cambridge's Nine Lessons and Carols will also be music director Stephen Cleobury's last in post. Richard Morrison explores the service's now legendary status – and bids Cleobury himself a fond farewell

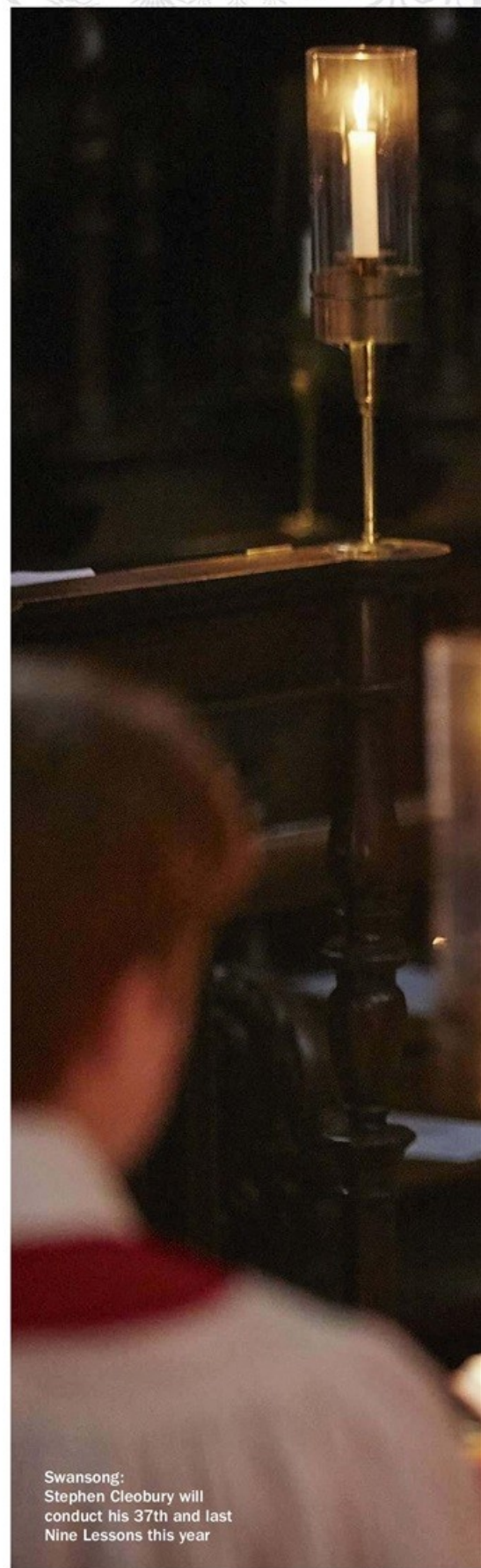
PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES CHEADLE/KEVIN LEIGHTON

Most 'ancient' Christmas traditions turn out to be not much older than your granny. The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge, is no exception. True, King's pinched the basic format – nine biblical readings interspersed with carols for choir and congregation – from a service devised in Victorian times at Truro Cathedral. But the Cambridge version, prefaced by that sonorous bidding prayer exhorting us to remember those 'who rejoice with us but on another shore and in a greater light' – dates only from 1918.

And how poignantly those words must have sounded in that particular year,

echoing through the wintry twilight of the candlelit chapel. Like every other town, village and city in Europe, Cambridge must have been a desolate place 100 years ago, haunted by the ghosts of students who had never returned from Flanders and were indeed 'on another shore and in a greater light'.

Last month I asked a group of present-day King's choristers, most of them 11 or 12 years old, if they had any idea why King's had inaugurated its Nine Lessons just a few weeks after the 1918 Armistice. 'I think they did the service to cheer people up after the war,' one replied. 'Yes,' said another, 'England was completely torn apart by the war. This reminded people



Swansong:
Stephen Cleobury will
conduct his 37th and last
Nine Lessons this year





of the happier side to life.' A third added: 'The service gave people the chance to reflect on what had happened, and how God brings light into darkness.'

Thoughtful words, and probably exactly right. Certainly Stephen Cleobury who, as director of music at King's, will conduct the Nine Lessons service for the 37th and final time this Christmas Eve, would not disagree with his young charges. 'Increasingly as the years have passed,' he says, 'I have come to feel that the worldwide appeal and enduring power of this service is partly about the way it connects people back to things they were familiar with in their childhood, or things they've lost touch with in their lives generally.'

Like Christian faith? 'Well, in essence it tells the story of the birth of a child, and that reaches out to everyone whatever your religious viewpoint. And the tradition of starting with a solo boy singing the first verse of *Once in Royal David's City* also touches something deep inside people. I'm not surprised. I recently sat down and re-read the text of that hymn, just as poetry. It's a wonderful journey through a whole spectrum of emotions.'

Yet in the interests of historical accuracy we have to point out that, back in 1918 at King's College's first Nine Lessons and Carols, the service actually didn't begin that way. 'No, we still have the service sheet,' Cleobury says. 'It began with *Up! Good Christian Folk and Listen*. You know, the carol that starts 'ding dong ding, ding-a-dong-a-ding'. But they did *Once in Royal*



straight after that, and it's been sung first every year since 1919.'

And has it always been performed with a solo treble? 'Actually no,' Cleobury says. 'There are early recordings in which all the trebles sing the first verse – and even with organ accompaniment!'

That sacrilege won't be happening this year, even though Cleobury's choice of music will reflect the history of the Nine Lessons in other ways. 'First, I have chosen half-a-dozen carols that we know were done in 1918,' he says. Not hard, one imagines. His second plan, however, is more intriguing – to include a carol written by each of the people who directed the choir at King's during the past 100 years (see box, p37). There have been only six of them, but they are a disparate bunch.

'Arthur Mann was the first, and he's well known for his harmonisation of *Once in Royal*, which of course we sing. Then came Boris Ord and Harold Darke, who filled in during the Second World War when Ord was away. So we will include their classic settings of *Adam Lay Ybounden* and *In the Bleak Midwinter* respectively. After that came David Willcocks, Philip Ledger and me – and you'll hear the odd piece by each of us as well.'

Just to keep the entire 2018 service 'in house', this year's specially commissioned carol, *O Mercy Divine*, setting a text by Charles Wesley, will be composed by a distinguished graduate of King's College, Judith Weir, now the Master of the Queen's Music. What's more, it will feature a solo cello part played by Guy Johnston, who



modernist phoned Cleobury to ask if he could include a passage where the boy trebles stamped their feet and shouted – not exactly standard practice in the hallowed choir stalls of King's. 'I replied, "yes, if that's what you want to do",' Cleobury recalls. 'And of course the children in the

choir loved it, because after singing four or five pages of Birtwistle's very demanding music, they got to let off steam.'

Well, that's how Cleobury recollects it now. But one can imagine that at the time this most dedicated of choir directors must have seethed inwardly about the possible harm to his choristers' precious larynxes. The present-day choristers are certainly in no doubt about his feelings on that matter. 'Once we were playing a game called German Spotlight, where you have to run across a dark area without

Even more striking, however, is their regard for Cleobury. To the outside world, the veteran choir director may seem reserved, cerebral and emotionally buttoned-up. Not to his choristers. 'You have to be in partnership with him to see an entirely different world of emotions revealed,' one 12-year old told me. 'Yes,' another observes, 'he tries to stay fierce and almost metallic when he's training us, but deep down he's a really emotional man. This year, because it's his last year, he sometimes cries after we sing anthems that really affect him.'

What they all particularly remember is what happened after Cleobury had an accident in Cambridge last March – a collision with a bike that left him with serious injuries. 'When he came out of Addenbrookes [Cambridge's hospital] he came straight to us, his choristers, before he went anywhere else,' one boy says.

It even seems that Cleobury's sense of humour – again, not always apparent to

'The service tells about the birth of a child, and that reaches out to everyone'

being caught by people pointing torches,' one recalls. 'It usually has a lot of shouting and screaming. Well, the next morning in corry practice Mr Cleobury really got mad at us for ruining our voices. But I think we all realise that we have to take care of our voices, because if you don't they will break quicker and then you leave the choir earlier. And I think all of us want to stay in the choir for a long time.'

The life of a boy chorister at King's is structured with military discipline. Rise at 7am, washed and dressed by 7.10, breakfasted by 7.40, then 30 minutes of instrumental practice before 'corry practice' at 8.10 with Cleobury or one of the King's organ scholars. Then into a full school day (the choristers are just 18 pupils out of 420 boys and girls, aged 4 to 13, at King's College School) before, most days, a full rehearsal with the choral scholars (male undergraduates singing alto, tenor and bass), and evensong. It's a punishing schedule. Yet all the boys I spoke to loved it, and considered it a privilege to be there.

the outside world – is robust enough to tolerate practical jokes in the choir. 'One year, as an April Fool, the altos took helium before the service,' one chorister recalls. Well, why not? People frequently talk about the King's College Choir reaching 'celestial heights'.

How does Cleobury himself deal with the strain and stress of leading the Nine Lessons and Carols? After all, the event is broadcast live to millions, and this global audience includes hundreds of thousands of choir directors and singers listening intently for the tiniest flaw in the famously pristine King's sound. 'A really important part of my job, in terms of preparing the choir, is not to communicate any of that strain and stress to them,' he replies. 'I don't like to start conversations with "are you going to be nervous?" I think if they are really well prepared, and if I maintain a calm demeanour, the choristers and the choral scholars can deal with the whole experience with equanimity.' Yet there's one moment, just before the service

Top lines: the choristers in the chapel stalls; (above) Stephen Cleobury; (above left) the college's memorial chapel for students who died in the world wars

was himself a King's chorister in the early Cleobury era.

Ask Cleobury to name his biggest innovation and he will point to these specially commissioned carols. They have certainly engaged an eclectic range of composers. One of the best was an earlier effort by Weir, called *Illuminare Jerusalem*, that is now a fixture in the Christmas repertoire of many choirs. But its popularity pales beside another Cleobury commission: John Rutter's *What Sweeter Music* ('beautifully crafted as always,' Cleobury says).

Then there was the year that he bravely commissioned contemporary composer Harrison Birtwistle. Alarm bells started ringing a couple of months before the service, when the uncompromising

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starts, when that mantra of 'preparation makes for perfection' is cast aside, and it's a paradox that's not lost on the choristers. 'For the solo at the start of *Once in Royal*, Mr Cleobury selects four people in rehearsal prior to the service, then at the very last moment he points to the person he has decided will do it,' one chorister explains. 'It's so unlike him. Normally he likes to be so organised, but right before this big service he decides completely on the spur of the moment. I expect it's to stop us being nervous and getting competitive about it.'

To mark the centenary of the Nine Lessons at King's, the choir's own record label has issued a double-album featuring historic recordings going back to 1958 (though, sadly, none from the Boris Ord or Arthur Mann eras) alongside new carol

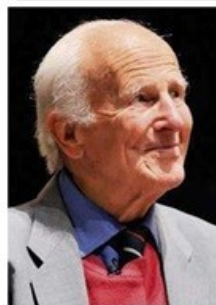
'Spoken English has become much lazier over the past decades'

recordings by the present choir. Inevitably, it prompts the question of how much the sound has changed over the decades, and especially while Cleobury has been in charge of it. 'The latter is hard for me to judge,' Cleobury replies. 'I certainly didn't come in with the intention of making it "my" sound. But the historic recordings do show how much vowel sounds have changed since the days when the choir used to sing "I was gled" at the start of Parry's anthem. And I seem to spend proportionately more of my time now ensuring that the children pronounce all the consonants, because spoken English has become much lazier over the decades.'

In essence, however, the sound that King's has produced under Cleobury is recognisably derived from what Willcocks nurtured in the 1960s. The big question is what happens next. When Cleobury retires next summer his successor will be (as predicted by *BBC Music Magazine* last year) the young, ambitious Daniel Hyde – a former King's organ scholar who



Sense of occasion:
Philip Ledger in 1980
and (left) David Willcocks



Six conductors of the Nine Lessons

The half-dozen King's College Choir directors since 1918

1876-1929

Arthur Henry Mann
The founder-director of King's Nine Lessons festival stayed with the

choir until his death, transforming it from Cambridge's worst to one of the world's finest. Among his achievements there was to persuade the powers that be to set up the college's choir school. Away from King's, Mann was the first to publish a singing edition of Tallis's 40-part motet *Spem in alium*.

1929-57 Boris Ord

The composer of the perennial *Adam lay y-bounden*, his only published carol, consolidated Mann's work, taking the choir to new heights with demands for the highest professional standards. He also insisted they sing a wide range of repertoire from early music to contemporary works.

1941-45 Harold Darke (*Boris Ord's substitute during World War II*)

Darke took the reins for the years that Ord spent in the RAF during the war. In his day, Darke was a formidable organist, his reputation stemming from his days at St Michael's Cornhill where he gave popular weekly recitals. His choral setting of *In the Bleak Midwinter* was voted in our Christmas 2008 issue as the finest carol of all time.

1957-73 David Willcocks

Willcocks, who died in 2015, was born just one year after King's College's inaugural Nine Lessons and Carols. Among his many achievements with the choir were multiple international tours, radio and TV appearances and dozens of recordings including a now legendary disc of Allegri's *Miserere*. Above all, it was his humour and warmth of personality that made him one of King's most revered and adored directors.

1974-82 Philip Ledger

Continuing Willcocks's great work of recordings and tours, Ledger's principal legacy was his insistence on fostering a sense of occasion for every service. Ledger was subsequently chairman of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and was president of the Royal College of Organists and the Incorporated Society of Musicians.

1982-2019 Stephen Cleobury

Cleobury will leave the ship in fantastic shape after his 37 years nurturing and training generations of choir members. On top of his many achievements, his introduction in 1983 of a specially-commissioned carol every Christmas has proved especially popular over the years and will doubtless remain a King's tradition. In 2012, Cleobury helped the choir set up its own label, which has since put out over 30 records.



Not long to Hyde:
the next director at
King's arrives in 2019

Daniel Hyde

A chat with the new man at King's

'Stephen Cleobury is my old mentor from my days as an organ scholar from 2000 – my years as a student at King's gave me so much of the training I rely on every day. I was thrown in at the deep end, doing a job that in cathedrals is done by professionals. And I love the building – the smell is always the same, as is the sound.'

'When I arrive as director of music in 2019, there are things that people may want to change, or indeed I may want to change: perhaps adjust the routine of the choir and develop certain aspects of the repertoire. To be honest, I don't know until I get there. The main challenge with choirs like this is keeping what they already have – you have to fight to maintain what exists. I'm sure that will be the primary focus. The opportunity to come and do this job comes up once in a lifetime, really.'

Directing my first Nine Lessons and Carols will probably be quite nerve-racking – it's the annual showpiece that we all work towards and you have a great deal of job satisfaction when it's done. One of the beauties of it is that it's structured in its format and language, so being able to be flexible with the music adds to the contrasts. I don't see the need to change very much, but some people seem concerned with what I'm going to do with descants!



Run of excellence:
the chapel choir is noted
for its treble sound

has bagged four increasingly prestigious appointments in quick succession (at Jesus College Cambridge, Magdalen College Oxford, St Thomas's Church in New York and now King's). And Hyde, it seems, is determined to shake up the sound. In an interview in *The New Yorker* two years ago he made not exactly supportive comments about 'the traditional very polite English cathedral choir sound, where one is never louder than lovely, and it's all very nicely packaged, and all the i's are dotted and the t's crossed', and gave the interviewer the impression that he 'sometimes found the King's College Choir stifled by the weight that rested on such a storied ensemble' – whatever that means. Whether he will have the nerve to change the King's sound radically when he runs the show remains to be seen.

And there's another contentious issue to be tackled. With many cathedrals now running girls' choirs alongside the boys, the all-male formation of the King's choir (along with those at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral) looks increasingly anachronistic, not to say indefensible. Even insiders at King's admit this. 'I can definitely see a day when there will be some kind of change,' says Yvette Day, who is both head teacher at King's College School and holder of the historic title Master Over the Choristers. 'Everyone

here is conscious that there needs to be the same kind of opportunity for girls. But what the opportunity ends up being, I wouldn't like to say. No girl wants to be in a second-best choir, so this move requires wisdom and creativity. There are lots of conversations to be had. Stephen Cleobury would be having them now if he weren't retiring, but I know we will have them with Daniel Hyde when he takes over.'

But that cataclysmic change lies in the future. This year it's all about Cleobury, who will conduct his final evensong on 8 July next year, then embark on his last tour with the choir – fittingly to Australia, the location of his first tour back in 1983. 'Yes, it really has come full circle,' he says. What will be his feelings at the end? 'Mixed,' he replies. 'King's has been my life for 37 years, but there is a world outside.'

And after his last Nine Lessons is over, where will he actually spend Christmas and celebrate his 70th birthday on New Year's Eve? 'We will head straight to York, where we've bought a house. And where my youngest daughter has just become a chorister at the Minster. So she will be singing there on Christmas morning.' ☺ *This year's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 4 on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day on Radio 3 (with full organ voluntaries)*

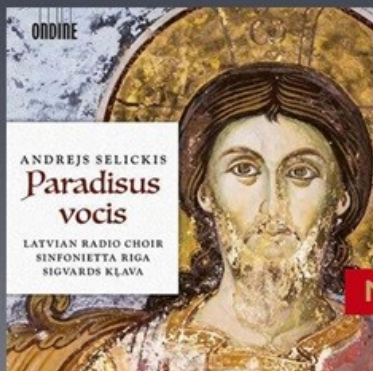
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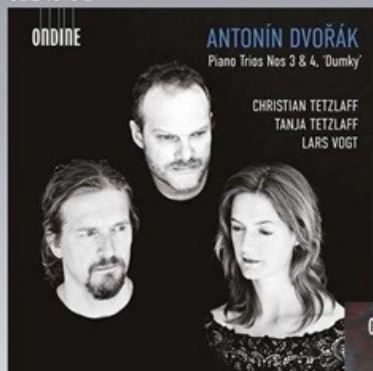
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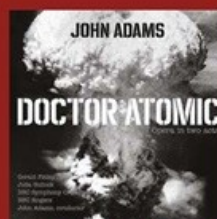
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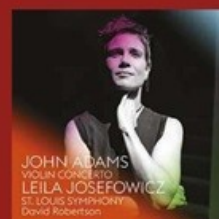
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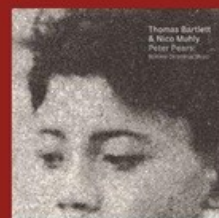
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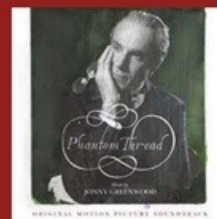
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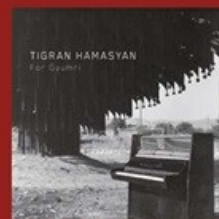
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“If you’re going to compose professionally, you have to sit down and learn how to do it. Every day I discover something new”

THE BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

Thea Musgrave



As she celebrates turning 90, the composer talks to Radio 3's **Clemency Burton-Hill** about the secrets of living a good life and carving out a distinctive career in music

PHOTOGRAPHY: LAURA BARISONZI

In a modest apartment in an iconic Beaux-Arts building on New York's Upper West Side, the great Scottish-American composer Thea Musgrave is trying to convince me to have a glass of wine rather than a cup of tea. It's 5.30pm. 'Are you going to have one?' I ask. 'I already have,' she shrugs, matter of factly. 'We always have a wine at four o'clock.'

The novelist Maya Angelou once noted that 'life loves the liver of it'. Musgrave, who celebrated her 90th birthday in May, is walking proof. 'We' is Musgrave and her devoted husband of almost five decades, the American viola player, conductor and founder of Virginia Opera, Peter Mark. All around their home are glimpses into lives well lived: bookshelves crammed with volumes on everything from law to

poetry to orchestration; a bowl full of fresh tomatoes, sweet potatoes, apples from the farmers' market; huge windows through which floods Manhattan's late-afternoon light. Wine duly poured, she insists on giving me the tour before we sit down to talk, explaining that she first lived in this extraordinary building – The Ansonia, also once home to Caruso, Stravinsky and Rachmaninov – as an illegal sub-letter decades ago, while teaching at Queens College. ('I thought I'd seen everything!' she quips. 'Then you move to New York.')

Musgrave is certainly a person who appears to find interest in everything. Down the narrow hallway, her study turns out to be filled with paintings. 'This little one, somebody gave it to me, to look at when I don't feel like working,' she guffaws. Does she ever not feel like working? 'Sure. But I just do. And then you get over it.' Here is a little Turner seascape, on which she once based a piece, *Turbulent Landscapes*; there is a 'gift from a friend about coal miners', which also became a Musgrave subject. (Her myriad other topics have included the American Civil War, various Greek myths and historical figures such





Symphony in tea: composers Richard Rodney Bennett, Malcolm Williamson, Thea Musgrave and Peter Maxwell Davies get together in 1965

as Mary, Queen of Scots, the activist and abolitionist Harriet Tubman and Simón Bolívar.) As we leave the room – she is a brisk walker – she points to an abstract, kinetic swirl of colour. ‘I love this painting,’ she says. ‘I don’t particularly like sport but to me it’s like Bolívar, who said “America is ungovernable” ... you see the ball coming, and then it’s gone, you just missed it.’

This compact room, with the permanent buzz of New York traffic audible from Broadway below, is where Musgrave still works, every morning. Upon her desk is a well-thumbed instrumentation and orchestration manual. ‘Oh, I always use that to check registers,’ she explains. ‘I know the instruments but I forget – you know, “how low does a harp go”. You don’t want to put a note in that doesn’t exist.’ Such pragmatism is central to Musgrave’s approach. ‘If you’re going to do this professionally, you have to bloody well sit down and learn how to do it,’ she says. ‘You really have to know what you’re doing. And you know, I’m still learning. Every day I discover something new.’

It was almost something else that Musgrave did professionally. When she went up to Edinburgh University in 1947, it was originally to study medicine. ‘I was going to discover the cures to all the diseases: cancer, TB, well AIDS hadn’t happened yet but I would have wanted to cure that too. Such is the arrogance of youth.’ Instead she found herself in a pre-med class, ‘cutting up frogs and doing all sorts of other boring stuff.’ She had been playing the piano since childhood, however, and found she ‘kept going into the music building next door to see what was cooking’. ‘Finally I said to my piano teacher: “I think I really want to go into music”, and you know what she said? “If you are a bad doctor you get struck off the list so you can’t do anybody any harm. Unfortunately that’s not the same in music.” With that warning in mind, I still decided: music was the thing.’

That fateful decision has been roundly vindicated over the course of a seven-decade career, which has included major works such as a Horn Concerto for Barry Tuckwell that premiered in 1971 at the



Proms, and the 1977 opera *Mary, Queen of Scots*, for which she also wrote the libretto and conducted the premiere. This year alone, Musgrave has juggled multiple world premieres; taken on a slew of new commissions including a new work for a major English music festival next year; and regularly criss-crossed the Atlantic as the central focus of festival celebrations

‘With the arrogance of youth, I was going to discover cures to all the diseases’

everywhere from Edinburgh to Stockholm to London’s Trinity Laban, which this December gives a rare outing of her 1979 opera *A Christmas Carol* as part of their Venus Blazing festival. Her boundary-pushing music, which is spectacularly rich in musical language and narrative drama, was also recently honoured with the Ivor Novello Classical Music Award and the Queen’s Medal for Music. ‘Quite a lot of loot for one summer,’ jokes Mark, who has been pottering around the apartment and now, after rummaging around at the back of a drawer, produces a thick, solid silver

disc, around which spools an immortal phrase of John Dryden: ‘What passion cannot music raise and quell’. ‘They’ve etched her name in too,’ he says, proudly. ‘See: look.’ ‘It’s heavy,’ Musgrave warns.

It’s touching and humbling, being in the presence of these two, who have been married some 47 years and remain evidently besotted. (They’ve never had children – ‘we married late and never wanted them’.) It was a stroke of chance that brought them together at all, when Musgrave agreed to cover a colleague’s three-month sabbatical in California. ‘I had no intention of leaving London,’ she recalls. ‘I had my friends there, and a “special” friend whom I was living with. I certainly wasn’t husband-hunting. But I met him, and then: whoops. I said to myself “no, no, no”. But things changed and a year later we got married.’ She almost hadn’t gone to the US in the first place. ‘It was the height of the Vietnam war. I was at home watching television and saw that the Bank of America in Santa Barbara was being burned. I said “I’m not going anywhere where students burn banks!” Then it calmed down a little and I came, but the Kent State shootings happened not long after I got here. When you meet in those circumstances, you don’t waste time on bullshit like “it’s a lovely day today”. You talk about real stuff, right off.’





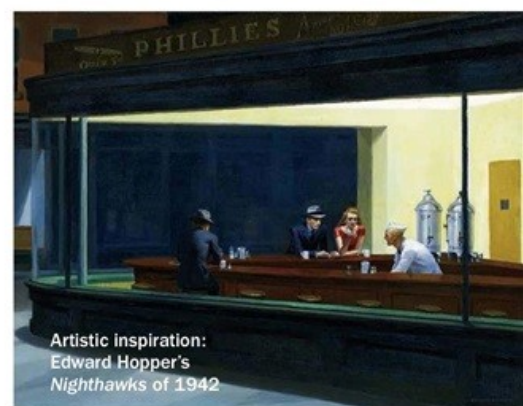
What, I wonder, does she make of our own turbulent political times, especially here in America? 'I think we have to do a lot of serious thinking and talking,' she says, gravely. 'I'm not especially political, but these kind of politics hit everybody, especially women. Women have to be treated fairly for what they do.'

Ah, yes. The 'W' word. I'm glad she brought it up, because I certainly wasn't about to. She must surely, by now, be bored of people remarking on her gender. 'Well I never had the thought, "I'm a woman so I can't do this",' she admits. 'All I knew was that, whether I was a woman or a man, I bloody well had to learn what I was doing. I really had to study hard, which I did: three years at university and then four years in Paris to study with [Nadia] Boulanger. Well there she was, and her sister Lili had been a famous composer, and when I went back to London, there were people like Lizzie [Elisabeth] Lutyens, Betty [Elizabeth] Maconchy, her daughter Nicola [Le Fanu]. It was only when I came to America that people really started saying: "you're a woman, how do you do it?" I thought it was a little late in the day to start asking that. It doesn't matter who you are: the battle for anybody, women or men, is to really learn your profession.'

On that front, the legendary Boulanger, who taught musicians from Aaron

Copland to Elliott Carter to Quincy Jones, must surely have helped? 'Oh, she was incredible, really incredible. For a couple of years I had private lessons with her, then I also went to her "piano accompaniment" class at the Conservatoire, with colleagues such as Michel Legrand. She always said "you have to be true to yourself, but don't try to be original: do what you feel is right. Because what's original today will be old hat tomorrow. But if it rings true, something will last from that." I think that's true – it's what I have also told my own students. And perhaps you might think: "but what happens if people don't like it?" Too bad. You have to go with what you like, and if you like something strongly enough there's always the hope that someone else will also like it! You can't take care of everyone in an audience. The thing is to find yourself and do what you want to do.'

At 90, I wonder, has she found it? Can she now sit back, take stock, perhaps even allow herself a moment to bask in what has been a remarkable and trailblazing career? Her twinkling eyes widen; she looks genuinely horrified. 'No! Every piece is a new beginning. I'm doing something new, with entirely new challenges, and I have to work bloody hard to figure out how to deal with them!'



Artistic inspiration:
Edward Hopper's
Nighthawks of 1942

Unmissable Musgrave

Five great pieces to explore

Clarinet Concerto (1968)

This single-movement concerto is, writes Musgrave, an exploration of a 'dramatic-abstract' idea. So think theatrical, but without a story. It was premiered by clarinettist Gervase de Peyer, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Colin Davis.

Mary, Queen of Scots (1977)

Thea Musgrave's acclaimed fourth opera explores what happened to Mary Stuart (below) between 1561, when she had returned to Scotland a widow, and 1568, when she sought protection in England. The libretto is based on the play *Moray* by Amalia Elguera.

Phoenix Rising (1997)

This vibrant orchestral piece, with a spotlight on timpani and horn, was performed at this year's BBC Proms to celebrate Musgrave's 90th. It features her trademark dramatic flair – and a touch of humour too.

Night Windows (2007)

'Walking down a darkened street it's hard to resist looking in through lighted windows and catching a glimpse of other people's lives...' Tantalising Edward Hopper-scenes blossom in this chamber piece written for oboist Nicholas Daniel.

The Voices of our Ancestors (2014)

Drawing inspiration from the Indian *Rigveda*, this piece for chorus and orchestra uses texts in a host of languages, including Latin, Hebrew and Persian, that explore what it means to be alive.



Vivaldi's Virgins

...and other unlikely tales

Love Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy? Beethoven and the Brontës? We dip into the best – and worst – novels written about the great composers

WORDS: OLIVER CONDY, JEREMY POUND, REBECCA FRANKS, MICHAEL BEEK AND FREYA PARR

The turkey's been eaten, there's nothing good on TV, and everyone's fallen out playing Monopoly. What's next?

Perhaps it's time to curl up with a cup of cocoa and a good book. Classical bookworms can feast on a wealth of novels about performers, from Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* to Ann Patchett's operatic thriller *Bel Canto*. But how about if you head to the 'composer' section of the bookshelf? We're not talking fictionalised artists – the likes of Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* – but novels that take a look at the lives and worlds of real people. So read on to find out how we rate ten fictional yarns about the great composers, from Strozzi in London to Elgar in the Amazon...

RATINGS GUIDE

FACTS: just how much do we learn about the composer and their world?

FUN: is it a rollicking read or one for the slush pile?

The Noise of Time

JULIAN BARNES (*Vintage*)

A poetic story based on Shostakovich's life under Stalin's dangerous gaze

This was quite rightly a bestseller when it was published in 2016. In his three-part tale, Barnes plunges us into Shostakovich's nervous existence. Waiting 'On the landing' the composer anticipates an inevitable arrest, following the *Pravda* article that almost ruined him. Then

'On the plane' he endures a flight to New York in the service of the Soviet regime, and finally during a meandering journey taken 'In the car' he muses on his legacy as he enters his twilight years. Through each he reflects on the life he lived (mostly in fear of something), the loves he enjoyed (and endured) and the music he wrote. Barnes's prose is elegant and the fragmented structure makes you feel that you're inside the composer's head, flitting from one memory to the next. Of course, the musings are really Barnes's – this is a fictional take on documented events and biographical detail – but his Shostakovich is a credible character. A riveting story of survival. **MB**

FACTS: ★★★★★

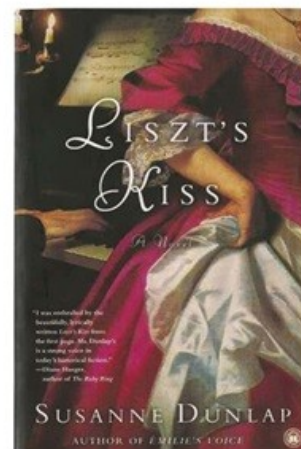
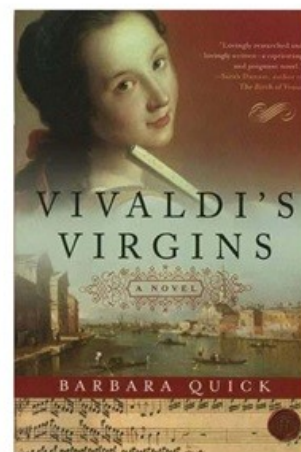
FUN: ★★★★★

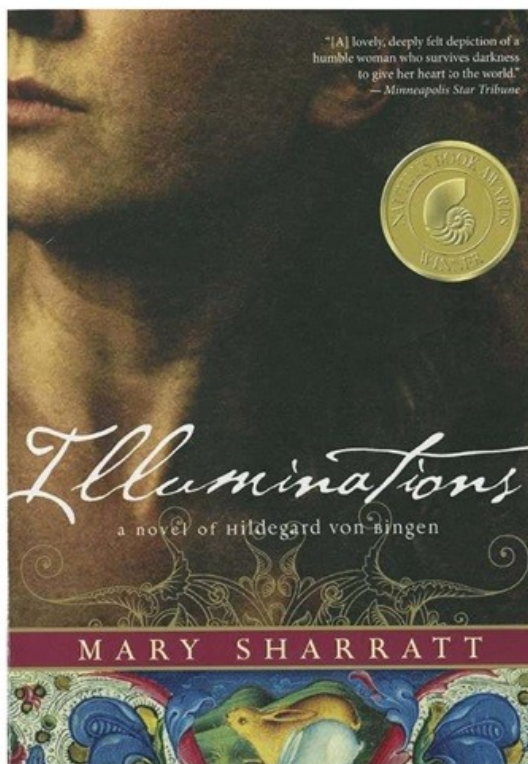
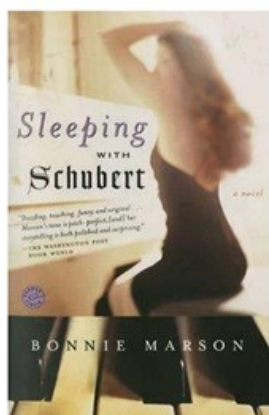
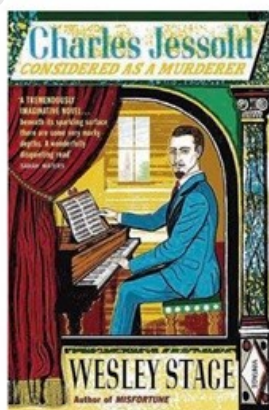
Mozart & the Wolf Gang

ANTHONY BURGESS (*Vintage*)

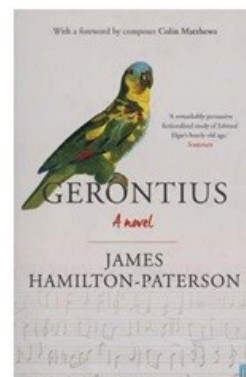
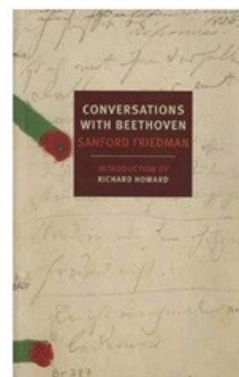
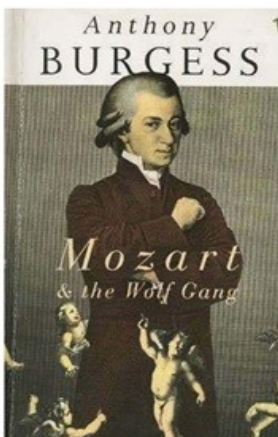
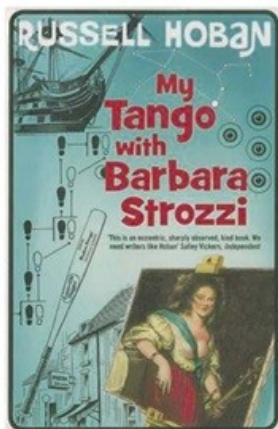
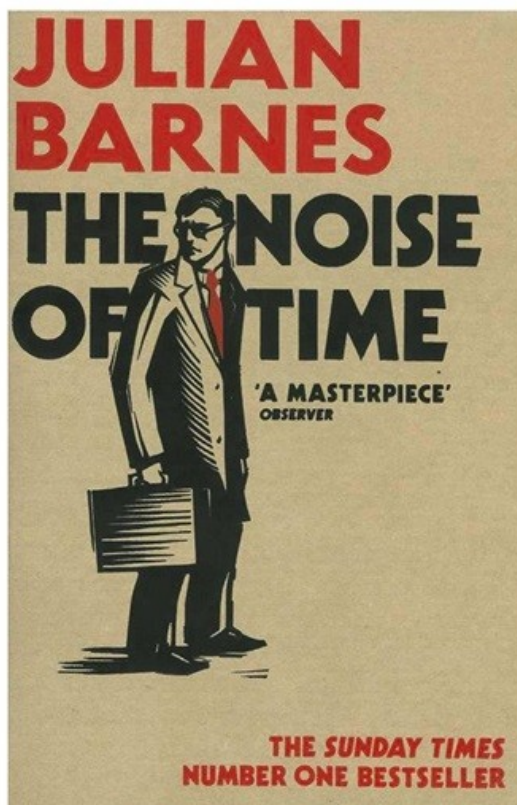
A slightly outré but nevertheless amusing look at a handful of arguing composers

A novel by Anthony Burgess? Surely something to savour. Prepare, however, to be disappointed. *Mozart & the Wolf Gang* is a very different beast to Burgess's renowned 1962 dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange*. Published in 1991 towards the end of Burgess's life (see p48), it is based around a set of discussions between famous composers, and is written like a play. This is persistently interrupted by a perplexing dialogue





Cover versions: which of these books should you add to your reading list?



between two characters named Anthony and Burgess, plus a fictionalised narrative of Mozart's Symphony No. 40. It's as erratic as it sounds.

There's no real plot – instead, the narrative arc is led by the constant bickering between the composers, who relentlessly put down one another's music, nationalities and political leanings. Amusing, if a little tiring. In short, this is a self-indulgent exploration of one of Burgess's favourite composers, and it's full of esoteric references that will be lost on a lot of readers. Really, it reads like an experiment that perhaps shouldn't ever have been published. **FP**

FACTS: ★★

FUN: ★★★

Vivaldi's Virgins

BARBARA QUICK (*Harper Collins*)

The evocative tale of a talented orphan violinist, exploring her roots in 18th-century Venice

OK, so the title might not inspire confidence, but there is treasure within the pages of Barbara Quick's 2007 novel. She paints a vivid picture of Venetian society, from its glittering masquerades to its downright dirty underbelly, all seen through the eyes of a young orphan growing up in the care of the Ospedale della Pietà. Anna Maria is a sensational violinist, under the tutelage of The Red Priest himself – and dedicatee of many of his works. Through her musings and letters we learn about life in the Pietà as a member of the 'figlie de coro', and get swept up in her search for her Mother. Vivaldi is painted as both father figure and mischievous ally, and there are memorable cameos, too, from Handel and Scarlatti. Quick has plainly done her homework; there's an abundance of musical detail and while this is fiction she takes her lead from documented people, places and events. A colourful, and sometimes emotional, read. **MB**

FACTS: ★★★★★

FUN: ★★★★★

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Gerontius

JAMES HAMILTON-PATTERSON (*Faber & Faber*)
A brilliantly imagined recreation of Elgar's undocumented adventure to the Amazon

When Anthony Payne elaborated the surviving sketches for Elgar's Third Symphony, he created a remarkable piece so Elgarian in feel that it was hard to tell musical fact from fiction. James Hamilton-Patterson achieves something similar in *Gerontius*, which draws on what we know about the British composer – his love of puns and of rivers, for instance – and fills in a period in his life that we know next to nothing about. In 1923, three years after his wife had died, the rather lost, disillusioned and semi-retired Elgar (pictured below) decided on a whim to take a six-week voyage to the Amazon, which is where this enjoyable novel steps in. True, it starts with a weighty and tiresome dream sequence, but the tale soon perks up. A vivid picture of Elgar emerges, as he gets to know his fellow sailors and encounters the heady Amazon. **RF**

FACTS: ★★★★★

FUN: ★★★★★

Sleeping with Schubert

BONNIE MARSON (*Ballantine Books*)

A lawyer finds herself sharing her existence with Schubert, with unhappy results

You may lose the will to live should you choose to read this. But anyway, here goes. While out shopping, New York lawyer Lisa Durbin finds herself inhabited by the ghost of Schubert (not a premise that comes easily). With her new guest on board, she becomes an overnight piano sensation and, later, the medium by which the composer introduces a series of previously unheard works to 21st-century audiences. As a host of grotesques – from her PR monster of a sister to a Juilliard professor from hell – line up to take advantage of her extraordinary gift, she has to come to terms with the idea of sharing her existence with a 19th-century genius. One might sympathise were Durbin, our narrator, not so insistently self-obsessed – we're given regular updates about her hair (large) and chest (also large), but learn little about her body-mate, poor old Schubert, other than that he gets giddy whenever a piano comes into view. Amusing? No. Touching? No. Erotic? Hardly. Don't expect *Sleeping with Schubert* to make the earth move for you. **JP**

FACTS: ★

FUN: ★



Liszt's Kiss

SUSANNE DUNLAP (*Simon & Schuster*)

A girl's encounter with Liszt marks a turning point in her quest for the truth about her father

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: Paris is in the grip of a deadly water-borne disease and Franz Liszt can't keep his trousers up. At least, that's how Dunlap's book initially unfolds. Liszt, the seducer of a 15-year-old aristocrat's daughter, actually turns out to be a sensitive sort, attracted to the married Marie d'Agoult, and shackled up with his chum in a garret where they seem to drink nothing but claret. Meanwhile, our young protagonist Anne's mother has died and her father has locked the family piano away, although that's soon the least of her worries. Lessons with Liszt, encounters with a mysterious suitor, and a suave doctor, provide the slightly flabby meat. But

A New York lawyer finds herself suddenly inhabited by the ghost of Franz Schubert

the music references are fun – Liszt emerges suitably flamboyant and enigmatic, and Erard's escapement mechanism, Paganini, Berlioz and Giuditta Pasta all get a look-in. But does Liszt get the girl? And is Anne as wet as she seems? The cliffhanger is at least worth waiting for. **OC**

FACTS: ★★★

FUN: ★★★

Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard Von Bingen

MARY SHARRATT (*Mariner*)

A not-so-musical account of the fascinating life of the composing nun

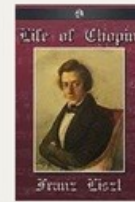
A cursory glance at this book's cover suggests it might belong on the shelves of a market stall specialising in crystals and tarot cards. Fortunately, however, the content inside is much more compelling. Mary Sharratt chronicles the fascinating life of Hildegard Von Bingen, who was sent to a monastery at a young age because of the visions she had been experiencing.

Hildegard's liturgical songs are peppered throughout the novel, primarily as motifs to explain various moments of importance in her life.

However, her music takes something of a back seat within the plot. The

A novel approach Books by composers

It was really during the Romantic era that words and music became more



closely intertwined and that composers started to dabble with writing books. Schumann

penned criticism and Wagner wrote his librettos, but it was *Liszt* who wrote a biography, of his fellow pianist-composer Frédéric Chopin. Meanwhile *Berlioz*, who adored Shakespeare, wrote the unusual *Evenings with Orchestra*, short



stories mingled with sketches and reviews as he imagines the chatter of a Parisian orchestra.

Between 1919 and 1940, *Smyth* turned her back on music and wrote ten works of non-fiction. Virginia Woolf, no less, urged her on, writing 'I was thinking the other night that there's never been a woman's autobiography... now why shouldn't you be the first to tell the truths about herself?'

Fast forward to 2017, and *Stephen Hough* became a published novelist as well as a pianist and composer. His no-holds-barred *The Final*



Retreat, was given five stars by our critic Claire Jackson. And composer *Kerry Andrew* joined the

debut novelist ranks when her novel *Swansong* came out earlier this year.



Heavenly gaze: Hildegard experiencing a vision, with her secretary Volmar and confidante Richardis

focus is instead placed on her pious life and relationships with the women around her. And she was quite the early feminist, which makes for an interesting subtext. Nevertheless, if you're after a thorough examination of Hildegard's musical output, you'll likely be disappointed. *FP*

FACTS: ★★★★★

FUN: ★★★

Charles Jessold, Considered as a Murderer

WESLEY STACE (*Vintage*)

A superbly entertaining insight into the darker side of early 20th-century English music

Charles Jessold, taken under the wing of critic Leslie Shepherd (the book's narrator), is one of the most promising English composers of his day, his works the toast of the town. But he has a troubled soul – alcoholism, sociopathy, the occult... and a fixation on the murderous crimes of his near namesake Carlo Gesualdo that manifests itself in his Britten-esque masterpiece, the opera *Little Musgrave*. From there, things unravel at a pace. Wesley Stace's novel is more than a rip-roaring tale – he knows his stuff, and peppers the book with wonderful insights into the critic-musician relationship, London's cliquey music scene and a delightful account of the premiere of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. What's most astonishing is that, without hearing a note, Jessold's music comes utterly to life thanks to Stace's brilliant contextual writing. Half the fun, too, is guessing who Jessold is modelled on. Is it Warlock, Grainger, Holst – even Vaughan Williams? Utterly quirky, informative fun. *OC*

FACTS: ★★★★★

FUN: ★★★★★



Anthony Burgess

'I wish people would think of me as a musician who writes novels, instead of a novelist who writes music on the side,' said Anthony Burgess. And the numbers back him up: yes, Burgess wrote an impressive 33 novels, but he also penned over 250 pieces of music, from piano miniatures to three symphonies. His operetta *Blooms of Dublin* was even broadcast by the BBC. Recently, there's been some interest in Burgess's music from performers; curious listeners can now hear pianist Richard Casey's Burgess album on the Prima Facie label and Stephane Ginsburgh's *The Bad-Tempered Electronic Keyboard* (on Grand Piano).

My Tango With Barbara Strozzi

RUSSELL HOBAN (*Bloomsbury*)

A quirky modern-day love story inspired by the Baroque Italian composer

When novelist Phil Ockerman takes a tour of an exhibition of composer portraits, he comes across an arresting picture of *La Virtuosissima Cantatrice*, Barbara Strozzi. 'What a woman!' he notes. Interest turns to an obsession with the 17th-century Venetian singer and composer. He goes home to luxuriate in her music, which in turn leads him to try out a tango class. There he meets Bertha Strunk, a professional glass eyeball painter who he thinks looks so like Strozzi that he starts calling her Barbara. The tale of their romance continues in this unlikely vein, and is packed with improbable coincidences and unexpected events that in a different author's hands would seem ridiculous. Here, somehow, Russell Hoban gets at the strangeness of ordinary life. We learn most about Strozzi at the start of the novel, but she then becomes a symbol for powerful infatuation. It's a shame she's not given her own voice – her real-life story is fascinating – yet this odd book might just inspire you to listen to her music. *RF*

FACTS: ★★

FUN: ★★★

Conversations with Beethoven

SANFORD FRIEDMAN (*New York Review of Books*)

The composer faces death in the company of those who know him best

Now this is rather clever. What we have here is a chronicle of Beethoven's last few months on this earth, depicted in a series of imaginary conversations that he might have had with those around him. We, however, only get to see what they were saying to him, communicating by written notes on account of his deafness – his spoken replies are left to our imagination. The narrative kicks off with the attempted suicide of Beethoven's beloved but flighty nephew Karl, and thereafter we are introduced to a series of family members, friends and professional acquaintances who, as the great man's health steadily declines, do little more than irritate him with their good intentions. He, in turn, drives them to despair with his petulance, paranoia and painful bloody-mindedness. As the various names come and go, you may want Google close at hand to tell you a little more about them – there's a lot to take in. It is, though, surprisingly engrossing. *JP* @

FACTS: ★★★★★

FUN: ★★★★★

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Good-will to men, and peace on Earth

Every Christmas, we invite a leading composer to write a carol for our readers. This year's, by Dobrinka Tabakova, has its roots in an Oxford chapel – and the pub



“I wanted to retain some liturgical mystery, but add another, more playful element”

When I was invited to write a carol for *BBC Music Magazine*, I had just completed one for the Truro Cathedral Nine Lessons and Carols service and had a previous advent work close to mind – my *Alma Redemptoris Mater* for the choir of Merton College, Oxford. Both of these works were conceived to be performed in a sacred context. In this new carol, I still wanted to retain some liturgical mystery, but add another, more playful element. While researching texts for the Truro carol, I came across Ralph Dunstan's collection *The Cornish Songbook* and was drawn to one of the carols there: *Heavenly sound*. As well as the upbeat good wishes, it was probably the 'Hark, hark' which adds a percussive punctuation and lifts the words, and gave me the idea of a (gentle) clapping counterpoint.

The image I had for the performance of my carol was more social – a Christmas sing-along at home or, perhaps, a slightly eccentric group of enthusiastic amateurs singing from smartphones in a pub (I know a few of those). The general mood is that of a contemporary round. The words dictated the rhythm of the carol, which I initially wrote in a stream of changing time signatures. The 'look' of the carol didn't quite sit with the more laid-back image I had of

people singing it, so I thought either to dispense with bar lines or simply not have time signatures and leave the bar lines to give some structure to the melodies.

Performance notes

One of the things I've noticed when people are faced with a page of different time signatures is that they make the music quite spiky and bouncy. That is not my intention here, and I hope that the lack of time signatures will put emphasis on phrasing rather than rhythm. In some places the melodies are quite long, so there will need to be stagger breathing – where each singer from the same line takes a breath at different times, creating the illusion that they are all singing one continuous melody with no break. Those places are marked with a broken slur where a natural breath would be taken.

The clapping is also not compulsory – in fact it would be better to just have some singers clap – and it's always the same pattern, which would ideally be learned by heart. The section from bar 77 ('Let mortals catch...') has a very low alto line, which may be welcomed by some, but it's fine to have those who find it too low to sing the soprano line and add tenors to the alto line.

I do hope my carol brings you joy. As much as the title 'Good-will to men and peace on Earth' may be a nod to past seasonal tunes, I couldn't think of a better wish now and for the future. ☺
We hope you'll include this carol in your service or concert. Do photocopy the music or download the PDF from classical-music.com and share! We'd love to hear your performances, so send any audio files or links to music@classical-music.com and we'll post to our website and social feeds. For more about Dobrinka Tabakova, visit dobrinka.com

Good-will to men, and peace on Earth

Text: 'Heavenly sound', c.1840 from
Ralph Dunstan's collection "The Cornish Song Book"

Dobrinka Tabakova

$\text{♩} = \text{c. } 84, \text{ Joyful}$ (aim to create a flowing singing line, not bouncy or overly accented)

SOPRANO
ALTO

mf

Be - hold a lu - cid Light a - p - pears, Which bright - ens all the east - ern sky, Hark, hark what sounds

TENOR
BASS

mf

Be - hold a lu - cid Light a - p - pears, Which bright - ens all the east - ern sky, Hark, hark what sounds

35 (✓) *gentle clapping (use same pattern across the piece)*

mp

sa - lute our ears, All glo - ry give to God on high.

mf

sa - lute our ears, All glo - ry give to God on high. "Good - will to men, and peace on Earth," The Heav' - nly Choirs u -

41 *mf*

"Good - will to men, and

(mf)

ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo - ry be to God on high. "Good - will to men, and

47 (✓)

peace on Earth, "The Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo - ry be to God on

peace on Earth, "The Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo - ry be to God on

53 *(mf)*

high. Be - hold a lu - cid Light a - p - pears, Which bright ens all the east - ern sky, Hark, hark what sounds

(mf)

high. Be - hold a lu - cid Light a - p - pears, Which bright ens all the east - ern sky, Hark, hark what sounds



59 (+ clapping, 2nd time)

sa lute our ears, All glo-ry give to God on high. Be - hold a lu - cid Light a - p - pears, Which bright - ens all the

sa lute our ears, All glo-ry give to God on high. "Good - will to men, and peace on Earth," The Heav' nly Choirs u -

65 *f* + clapping

east - ern sky, Hark, hark what sounds sa - lute our ears, All glo-ry give to God on high. "Good - will to men, and

ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; All glo-ry give to God on high. "Good - will to men, and

71

peace on Earth, "The Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo-ry be to God on

peace on Earth, "The Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo-ry be to God on

77 *mf* (no clapping)

high. Let mor - tals catch the sac - red flame, Till round the world the son shall fly Which sounds the Great Re - deem

high. Let mor - tals catch the sac - red flame, Till round the world the son shall fly Which sounds the Great Re - deem

83 *f* + clapping

er's Name and glo - ry be to God on high. "Good - will to men, and peace on Earth," The

er's Name and glo - ry be to God on high. "Good - will to men, and peace on Earth," The

88 2x poco rit [1. *mf* | 2.]

Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo-ry be to God on high. Be - high.

Heav' nly Choirs u - ni - ted cry At the Di - vine Re - deem er's birth; and glo-ry be to God on high. Be - high.

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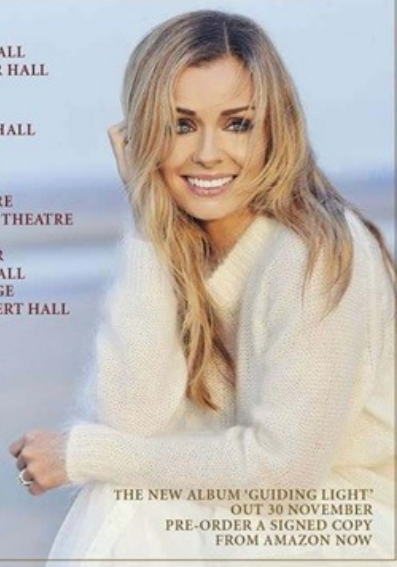
26 OXFORD NEW THEATRE
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29 MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL
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11 BATH FORUM
13 SOUTHAMPTON MAYFLOWER
14 LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
15 CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE
17 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
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25 GATESHEAD SAGE
26 GATESHEAD SAGE
28 EDINBURGH USHER HALL
30 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
31 LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC

APRIL 2019

02 BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL
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TUE 26 ABERDEEN MUSIC HALL

THU 28 PERTH CONCERT HALL

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SAT 09 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL

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TUE 12 CHELTENHAM TOWN HALL

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FRI 22 GUILDFORD G LIVE
SAT 23 PETERBOROUGH THE CRESSET
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THU 28 TORQUAY THE PRINCESS THEATRE
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SAT 30 LOWESTOFT MARINA THEATRE

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The playing of the merry organ

A whole world of Christmas organ music is out there just waiting to be discovered, says Paul Riley

There's no denying that choral music steals the limelight at Christmas, organ music allotted a few paltry minutes at the end of the service. By then, most of the congregation has headed for the exit and a warming glass of mulled wine, the organist's final bars accompanied by the clunk of a west-end door. We're all missing out. The organ repertoire is, in fact, a cornucopia (or should that be corneopean?) of thrilling festive works that deserve wider currency.

It is time, then, to shine a light on the very best Christmas organ music – pieces that will hopefully inspire both organists and congregations. From JS Bach's ingenious, ear-grabbing chorale preludes to Messiaen's vast nine-movement *La Nativité du Seigneur*, there are centuries of Christmas organ masterpieces to explore and enjoy. Here are 12 of the best.

Buxtehude *Chorale Fantasia on 'Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern'* (c 1690)

When the 20-year-old JS Bach secured a leave of absence to hear the doyen of the North German organ school on his home patch, it was not an undertaking for the faint-hearted. The round trip to make Buxtehude's acquaintance in Lübeck entailed a blister-inducing foot slog of 500 miles. Hardly surprisingly, Bach extended his stay and was able to savour the Advent and Christmas music in the Marienkirche, including the famous Abendmusik concerts arranged



Festive feet: JS Bach improvised organ chorale preludes

by Buxtehude. Given the season he might also have heard the aged organist play his extended Fantasia on the Epiphany hymn 'How brightly shines the morning star', a multi-sectional work including a meteor shower of swirling figuration and a joyous jig fugue.

JS Bach *Canonic Variations on 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her'* (1747)

Bach and Christmas probably start with the clarion call of *Wachet auf*, a cantata movement enshrined in the embrace of a famous chorale arrangement, published by Schübler. And



Realms of glory: Angels singing and playing music by Jan van Eyck



for the big day itself, the chorale preludes on *In dulci jubilo* either roar (BWV 729) or playfully scintillate (BWV 608). But for an extended example of Bach bringing all his contrapuntal firepower to bear within a work that never fails to twinkle, the 1747 Variations on Luther's Christmas hymn 'From Heaven above to earth I come' is a show-stopping *tour de force*. Demonstrating compositional prowess to the max, it nonetheless fancifully struck 19th-century biographer Philipp Spitta as 'like the gaze of an old man who watches his grandchildren around the Christmas tree and is reminded of his own childhood'. Stravinsky added baubles of his own in a festive 1956 reworking for choir and orchestra.

Daquin *Nouveau Livre de Noël* (c. 1757)

He might be best known for that delightful little harpsichord miniature *Le coucou*, but Daquin (1694–1772) was one of the greatest organists of the age and pipped Rameau to a church post in 1727 before ultimately taking charge of the organ loft at Paris's Notre Dame cathedral. Not to miss out on the French craze for *noël* arrangements, around 1757 he brought out a book of keyboard pieces based on the folk-like carols traditionally woven into the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass. A Musette recalls the Shepherds and their bagpipes, while a dancing 'Suisse' finale concludes the set in bombastic high spirits.

Brahms *Chorale Prelude on 'Es ist ein Ros entsprungen'* (1896)

Brahms expressed an early ambition to become a virtuoso organist, but he wasn't the first to discover that fluent piano skills don't necessarily translate. And after a modest clutch of pieces composed in the 1850s, he turned his back on the instrument until, in the year before his death, he embarked on a set of chorale preludes, a postscript to the late piano pieces. Among them is a tender meditation on that Lutheran Christmas favourite, *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, its noble melody artfully disguised and supported by a pillow of yearning chromaticism.

Ives *'Adeste fidelis' in an Organ Prelude* (1897)

After his riotous 1891 *Variations on America* for organ, it might have been expected that, six years on, when Charles Ives (1874–1954) turned to the jubilant strains of *O Come, All Ye Faithful*, he would pull out all the stops to evoke its rejoicing. In the event *'Adeste fidelis' in an Organ Prelude* (Ives's spelling), turns out to be just as subversive, if differently so. To a

hushed, shimmering accompaniment, the theme mournfully uncurls upside down before righting itself over harmonies more mystical than 'joyful and triumphant'.

Karg-Elert *Chorale Improvisation on 'In dulci jubilo' (1912)*

Although mostly associated with the organ these days, spurred on by Grieg, Karg-Elert (1877-1933) started out composing for piano, and found his way to the King of Instruments by way of the harmonium. The music he wrote for it – like that of Max Reger, his predecessor as professor of composition at the Leipzig Conservatory – revels in the sonorities of a large Romantic organ. Complete with double pedalling and dense textures, his big bear-hug of an improvisation on the 14th-century carol is no exception. A festive workout for player and instrument alike.

Dupré *Variations sur un vieux Noël (1923)*

The 18th-century French love affair with elaborate organ variations on Christmas carols by no means ended with the deaths of Daquin, Dandrieu and Balbastre. One of the most ingenious and virtuosic sets of the 20th century emerged in 1923 from the pen of Marcel Dupré (1886-1971), a composer-performer schooled by the formidable trinity of Guilmant, Vierne and Widor. Based on *Noël nouvelet*, it engineers thickets of contrapuntal complexity concealed beneath a disarming surface enchantment. By way of preparation for the inevitable fugato and grand toccata, Variation Nine sounds as if it's gone a little too liberally at the Christmas sherry.

Langlais *La Nativité (1932)*

Not be confused with Messiaen's extended epic, Langlais's *La Nativité* is the second of three *Poèmes Évangéliques* written in 1932 for a composition competition – Langlais's first organ music to make it into print. The set is bookended by representations of the Annunciation and the Entry into Jerusalem, while the central nativity tableau, a serene pastorella, falls into three sections. After the angels have brought their glad tidings, the shepherds are invoked in an old song, *Salut, ô sainte-crèche*, remembering Langlais's native Brittany, before the music peacefully subsides into contemplation of the Holy Family.

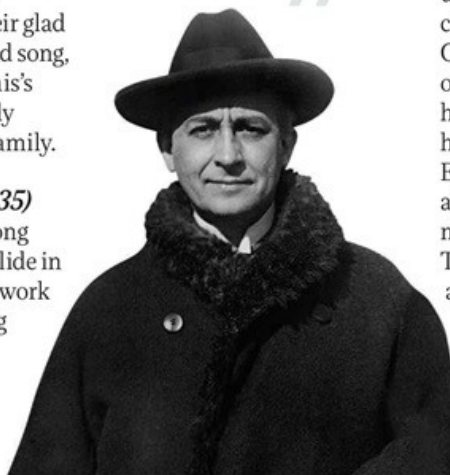
Messiaen *La Nativité du Seigneur (1935)*

Mountains, medieval stained glass, birdsong and a profound knowledge of theology collide in arguably the most important single organ work – certainly the most extended – pondering



Pipes of peace: Petr Eben united his Czech homeland and the UK in an organ work; (below) composer Marcel Dupré c1923

“ Variation
Nine of Dupré's
*Variations sur
un vieux Noël*
sounds as if
it's gone a little
too liberally at
the sherry ”



the Christmas story. Composed in 1935, its nine 'meditations' embody Messiaen's latest thinking about rhythm, melody and harmony. And they range over the pictorial such as the worshipping Shepherds or journeying Magi, and abstract reflections on the meaning of the unfolding story. 'Dieu parmi nous' wraps everything up in a final festive flourish.

Distler *Partita on 'Wachet auf' (1935)*

While this Partita by the German organist and composer Hugo Distler (1908-42) is roughly contemporaneous with Messiaen's *La Nativité*, it couldn't be more different. Whereas Messiaen's work breathes the incense of mysticism, Distler in his preface demanded that composers should 'blend the spirit of the present day... with the hierarchical and strict art of the past', a credo that shines through every neo-Baroque note, its title nailing its colours to the age of Buxtehude and Bach. Flanked by a toccata and fugue, even the central movement is called 'Bicinium', which invokes the two-part inventions of the Renaissance and early Baroque.

Maxwell Davies *Fantasia on 'O magnum Mysterium' (1960)*

Between periods studying in Rome and America, Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016) taught music at Cirencester Grammar School where, in 1960, he composed a sequence of carols and sonatas for the students on the Christmas Day plainsong *O magnum mysterium*. He described the work as a contemplation on 'the wonder and promise of the Nativity', and at its conclusion placed this mighty 15-minute solo organ Fantasia. Moving towards and from a powerful climax, it's a sparse, austere antidote to Christmas excess.

Eben *Variations on Good King Wenceslas (1986)*

Czech composer Petr Eben (1929-2007) could be forgiven for an outburst of national pride underpinning his 1986 Variations, but in fact the choice of theme was all about bridge-building. Commissioned to write a piece for the unveiling of Chichester Cathedral's newly-restored organ, he looked for something that would connect his homeland to the UK. Then he remembered the English medieval dance-carol subsequently adapted to extol the virtues of his nation's saintly monarch: *Good King Wenceslas*. Problem solved! Theme ingeniously teased out, the variations are punctuated by regal fanfare interjections to show off the Chichester reeds. ☺

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A paradise for pianists

Oliver Condy brushes up his keyboard skills on a weekend course at an idyllic country house

It's eight o'clock on a balmy Friday evening at Finchcocks, a beautiful Grade One-listed early-Georgian pile deep in the Kent countryside. The pastel orange light of the setting sun floods across the lawn, over the threshold and into the oak-panelled hall before scattering on the open lid of a black Bösendorfer grand. The vast room is otherwise empty save for a sofa and a couple of armchairs, and is awash with a gorgeous summer haze. Sitting at the piano is jazz musician and tutor Mark Polishook.

The weekend's jazz improvisation course doesn't officially begin until tomorrow but Polishook is keen to take advantage of the light and give his class of just seven a few things to think about before the morning. He starts to play one or two notes over and over, encouraging us to place our heads inside the piano to experience the piano's internal acoustic. Next, he suggests we walk gently around the room, hearing how it alters and modifies each solitary note. An exercise in listening. It's very hypnotic, and I already feel thousands of miles from work and the drudgery of life. This weekend is going to be fascinating.

Finchcocks piano courses are the brainchild of hedge fund manager Neil Nichols who, together with his wife Harriet, bought the house and its grounds



Time alone: a Yamaha in the refurbished cellar

for a reported £3m in 2016, principally as a family home. This isn't Finchcocks's first brush with music. In the 1960s, the Russian Legat Ballet set up a school here and, more significantly, until a few years ago it was the home of one of Britain's most important historical keyboard collections, owned and curated by Richard and Katrina Burnett. The museum was famous for its 1792 John Avery chamber organ and early 19th-century pianos including three Erards, but in 2015 the Burnetts were keen to retire and decided to sell up.

None of this was lost on Nichols, an amateur pianist himself. 'We were



living in London at the time, looking for a piano teacher for our sons,' he says. 'I found one opposite us on our street but he was a little too adult-focused. So I just thought, well I'll have lessons with him. After a year or so I saw a brochure on the lid of his piano, which was the Finchcocks auction brochure, with details of the 115 instruments for sale that week. I recognised the place because I'd been here on a school trip when I was 12 and had had a go on the harpsichords, clavichords and spinets.'

The family had no plans to move out of London, but nevertheless went on a fact-finding mission to Kent. The sight of the crumbling mansion and a glimpse of its contents were too much of a temptation to ignore. 'Viewed as a whole,' continues Neil, 'Finchcocks was an incredibly romantic proposition – the idea of coming down and restoring a building, turning it back into a family home. And then the big plan was to try to keep the music going. Not emulate what had been done before, not recreate the piano museum, but to keep the piano theme going in a way that was true to the



Musical drive:
Finchcocks's façade; (top left)
musical director David Hall
takes a class; (left) a place
to relax in the coach house

recent history of the building and our own personal interest. That, for me, was piano tuition for adults.'

An hour later we stop for food in the coach house, a once crumbling outbuilding that Nichols had restored in just three months to accommodate course attendees in splendid comfort and to provide a nerve centre for the weekend's downtimes. In reality, that simply means meals and sleeping – there's a lot to cram into two days. Friday-night dinner (all meals are cooked by a catering company and are terrific) gives everyone a chance to chat about their musical goals and aspirations, but also to shed those pre-course nerves and wallow in the prospect of talking non-stop music with like minds.

The structure of each course balances group sessions up in the hall with private practice on the house's nine grand pianos in the vaulted brick cellar. Some of these instruments were acquired from the Burnett collection, including a mellow 1893 Broadwood short grand (currently on loan from Broadwood), a sprightly seven-

foot Grotrian-Steinweg from the 1990s and a bold, bright, youthful Yamaha C3. You can even venture over to the house before breakfast – an ideal time for some uninterrupted playing and a guarantee you'll get some time on all of the pianos.

I already feel thousands of miles from work and the drudgery of life

And by getting up early, you'll be able to fit in a stroll around the grounds.

Because class sizes are so small, everyone receives a good amount of one-to-one attention, but most of the time is spent in each other's company, tutors demonstrating (and performing concerts), offering advice and encouragement and giving students a chance to share problems and successes with colleagues. It takes

a little time to break down barriers, but by the end of day one, we're all relaxed enough to lay bare our shortcomings – or even show off a little... On our jazz course, group lessons take the form of experimenting with chords and studying famous improvisations, but whatever the style of music, Finchcocks is a place that allows the headspace for uninterrupted study, if only for two days. 'Everyone who comes here loves the piano,' says Polishook. 'I get the sense that if most of them could give up their jobs and play music all day, they would. There's this magical hyper-enthusiasm. Being a tutor here is like having a class of just the very best students: the ones who really want to learn.'

Sunday afternoon, of course, comes way too soon, but we all feel we have a clear idea of what to do on Monday morning – the most important follow-up to any short course. Aside from booking another weekend at this little slice of musical paradise, that is... ☺

For information about forthcoming adult piano courses, visit finchcocks.com

MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

Kaohsiung City Taiwan

John Evans heads to East Asia for the opening of the spectacular Weiwuying, the world's largest performing arts centre under one roof



Landmark architecture:
(main) Weiwuying's
dramatic exterior; (right) the
concert hall and the vibrant
opening night celebrations

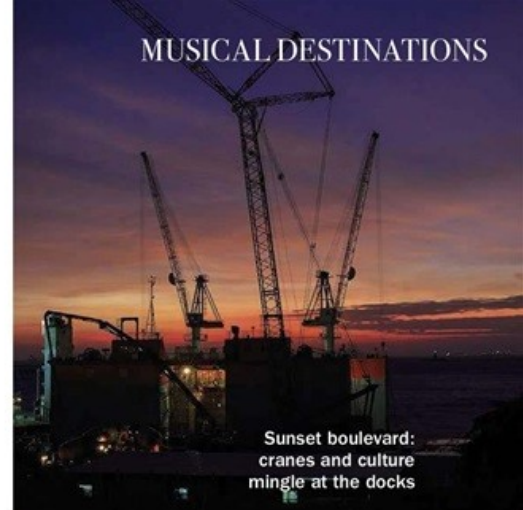
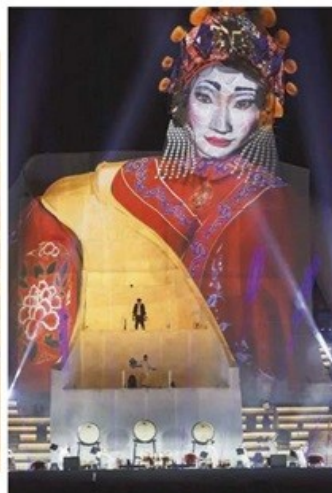
As if there weren't already enough reasons to visit Taiwan – the National Palace Museum in Taipei, the bustling night markets and nine national parks – along comes another: the National Kaohsiung Centre for the Arts, or Weiwuying as it's known.

Located on the site of a former military airbase in Kaohsiung City on the southern tip of Taiwan, it is the world's largest performing arts centre under one roof and the country's most significant cultural investment in a generation, costing £252m and taking 12 years to build.

We're used to Taiwan's appetite for infrastructure. For years, its capital city was home to the world's tallest building, Taipei 101. Since 2011, iTaiwan has been providing free Wi-Fi at thousands of hotspots nationwide. And the efficient rail system carries passengers at up to 186mph.

So we shouldn't be surprised by the sight of Weiwuying, a huge building covering 35 acres and whose design is inspired by the banyan trees in the surrounding 116-acre subtropical park. Under their protective canopies, people meditate, picnic or simply seek respite from the warm, damp air.

Like Symphony Hall is to Birmingham, so Weiwuying is to Kaohsiung City; a symbol of transition – from a grimy, industrial centre to a healthier and more sophisticated metropolis. The connection is closer still, since the Library of Birmingham and Weiwuying were both designed by Dutch architecture firm Mecanoo. For Birmingham, the 2013 library has become a popular cultural destination. It's hoped Weiwuying will inspire the same reaction in a city best known as the home of the world's 13th biggest container port.



Kaohsiung Pier-2 Art Centre A dockside excursion

Refreshed by a concert or opera at Weiwuying, leave the arts centre and head for Kaohsiung's Pier-2 Art Centre, a community of arts spaces and shops in some of the city's former dockside warehouses. A light rail system connects the area. Each year, Pier-2 hosts a major music festival, which turns 10 next year.

Browsing complete, take a boat trip to Hongmaogang Cultural Park, former home of the city's sea fishing community, long since relocated as Kaohsiung's container port expanded. On your way, you'll pass the hundreds of cranes on the docksides and fleets of ships leaving and entering the harbour. In contrast, Hongmaogang is a peaceful haven and its rotating seafood restaurant a winner.

'Weiwuying is key to Kaohsiung City's reinvention,' Francine Houben, Mecanoo's founding partner tells me during the centre's opening weekend in October. 'It's the challenge all second cities like Kaohsiung and Birmingham face: having to reinvent themselves and stay relevant. Fortunately, judging by the public reaction, we know Weiwuying makes people proud of their city.'

Nothing new there. Since Roman times, the purpose of great public buildings has been to make citizens' chests swell with pride, but it would be a disaster if Weiwuying's five giant performance spaces – a 2,236-seat opera house, 1,981-seat concert hall, 1,210-seat theatre, 434-seat recital hall and an enormous outdoor theatre – were to echo to the sound of nothing but straining shirt buttons.

Fortunately, Taiwan loves its classical music, an affection whose origins can be traced to the end of the Second World War when US forces occupied Taiwan and the country turned its face westwards, albeit briefly. By side-stepping China's cultural revolution, an appreciation of music and the arts, both traditional and imported, took root in Taiwan so that, today, music teaching and performance are flourishing.

For proof, I head north to Taichung, Taiwan's second largest city and home to the National Taichung Theatre, another striking arts centre with a 2,000-seat opera theatre. According to Toyo Ito, its Japanese architect, the building was inspired by the sun, air and water. Whatever; there's no denying the building's ingenious design and splendid opera theatre, where I experience a

spellbinding performance of Wagner's *Siegfried* by the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan with tenor Vincent Wolfsteiner and soprano Susan Bullock.

Back in Kaohsiung, Weiwuying's first season is dominated with concerts by the Berlin Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel, and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with Mariss Jansons. Setting the bar this high may pose future challenges for this relatively out-of-the-way arts centre, but in its favour, it's

Like Symphony Hall is to Birmingham, so Weiwuying is to Kaohsiung City

just one hour by plane from Hong Kong and 1.5 hours from Taipei by train.

In any case, the new centre is impressive and sure to attract major artists keen to perform with Taiwan's national orchestras and choirs, chief among them the Taiwan Symphony and Kaohsiung Symphony, and Kaohsiung Chamber Choir. At the launch they prove their worth with a superb Liszt Concerto No. 1 with pianist Meng-Chieh Liu and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*.

Both are performed in the concert hall, a sumptuous place crowned by a magnificent Klais organ that cost £2.7 million. The smaller recital hall is as notable with an asymmetric seating layout designed to allow more of the audience to see a pianist's fingers on the keyboard.

The vast opera theatre is even larger backstage and equipped with state-of-the-art systems that would make a UK stage manager weep.

But what's really clever is the outdoor theatre that descends from the building's interior to its edge and which is designed to host performances and arts activities. It's meant to connect the vast and slightly intimidating building with the park and its people, and it works. Time will tell if Weiwuying as a whole connects with Taiwan and the wider world, but on the strength of its launch concerts and the public's wholehearted support for it, the signs are promising. ☺

Further information:

For upcoming concerts at Weiwuying, visit www.npac-weiwuying.org



3

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is broadcast on Radio 3
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Howells's style



Rich harmonies

Howells developed a musical language that is unlike anyone else's. It includes long melodic lines, intricate counterpoint,

rich dissonances and unique cadential progressions.

Pathos Howells may have been the 'golden boy' of his musical generation and Stanford's (pictured above) favourite, but his life was clouded by uncertainty and tragedy. The ambiguous reception of certain works and the loss of his son were reflected in his music. His ability to express pathos and deep emotion in his music is incredibly powerful.

Connection with a musical past

Vaughan Williams described Howells as 'the reincarnation of a lesser Tudor luminary' so strong was his connection to the music of composers of that period. Examples of this are everywhere to be seen in Howells's output, and perhaps most obviously in the suites *Howells' Clavichord* and *Lambert's Clavichord*.

Spirituality and Sensuality Howells was the greatest composer of music for the Anglican Church of the 20th century. Part of his allure is his ability to tread the line between spirituality and sensuality. The latter induces a sense of ecstasy which connects with our inner beings. It is at its best in the reverberant spaces of a great building.

Herbert Howells

The atmospheric Carol Anthems were just the start of this British composer's remarkable outpouring of choral music, writes *Paul Spicer*

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

I have composed out of sheer love of trying to make nice sounds'. So said Herbert Howells in acknowledgement of his instantly recognisable, rich harmonic language and his seemingly endless streams of melody woven together, more often than not, in timeless contrapuntal textures.

Howells is known more for his choral and organ music than for his songs, piano, chamber and orchestral music. This is really because of a wholly serendipitous event at King's College, Cambridge in 1943. Howells was standing in as acting organist at St John's College, along the road, for Robin Orr who was on active service.

Howells was born in Lydney, Gloucestershire, on 17 October 1892, the youngest of eight children. His father was a jobbing builder and decorator who was simply too nice to collect the money owed to him and he thus slid into bankruptcy. That was so serious a social issue at the time that when Herbert was asked to tea at the local squire's house with the other town children he was sent to the kitchens. But Herbert adored his father who, as the boy noted, was 'a very humble businessman for six days of seven, and a dreadful organist for the seventh day' at the Baptist church which was next door. But despite these initial setbacks Herbert's

Howells felt that he and Vaughan Williams reacted to things in a musically similar way

One afternoon he was having tea with Eric Milner-White, dean of King's, Boris Ord, the college organist, and Patrick Hadley, who was later to become professor of music at the university. Milner-White lay down a challenge to Howells and Hadley to write a setting of the *Te Deum* for the King's Choir, offering one guinea to whoever took up the 'bet'. Howells responded and his now iconic *Collegium Regale Te Deum* was heard in King's chapel the next year. But it was far more than just another setting of these well-known words. '[It] opened a wholly new chapter in service, perhaps in church music. Of spiritual moment rather than liturgical. It is so much more than music-making; it is experiencing deep things in the only medium that can do it,' said Milner-White, adding that Howells could create 'masterworks'. This is exactly what the composer went on to do.

talent was recognised and the squire, Lord Bledisloe, helped to get the boy piano lessons with Herbert Brewer at Gloucester Cathedral. Before long Howells was accepted as one of Brewer's formidable trio of articulated pupils at the cathedral alongside Ivor Gurney and Ivor Novello. Gloucester cathedral was one of the hosts of the Three Choirs Festival, which attracted audiences from far and wide and featured significant new music. One of these premieres was Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* in September 1910 which Howells felt was 'the supreme commentary by one great composer upon another'. He also felt that he and Vaughan Williams reacted to things in a musically similar way: 'We were both attracted by Tudor music, plainsong and the modes. We felt we needed to write in these modes and in the pentatonic scale.'





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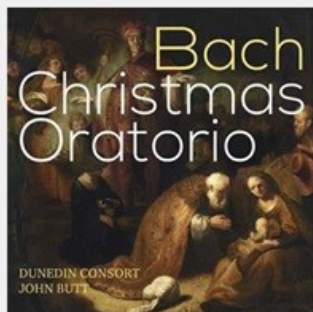


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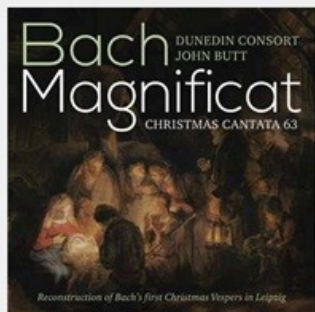
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SIEMENS
Ingenuity for life



Howells left Gloucester after winning a foundation scholarship to the Royal College of Music (RCM) to become one of Stanford's composition students. At his audition Hubert Parry, director of the RCM, noted in his diary, 'Amazingly gifted boy Howells from Lydney – & such a queer looking scrubby little creature'. Howells went on to become Stanford's favourite student, although Stanford felt his music was developing 'modern stinks', failing to realise that his greatest strength as a teacher was his ability to get his remarkable roster of students to develop their own styles.

Howells was quickly acknowledged as a leader of his generation of musicians. Arthur Bliss noted that 'I saw for the first time that here was someone who was much more gifted than myself. I never forgot that'. During these years Howells was writing far more chamber and orchestral music than choral. His large-scale C minor Piano Concerto was premiered by Arthur Benjamin and conducted by Stanford at the Queen's Hall in July 1914 and other works were taken up and widely admired – such as his orchestral suite, *The Bs*, celebrating a group of friends with names or nicknames beginning with B including Bliss and Benjamin.

Howells had been having problems with his eyes and Parry sent him to see a specialist. Diagnosed with Graves disease, a heart-related condition, aged only 23, he was given six months to live. Howells had recently been appointed as assistant organist at Salisbury Cathedral but his time there was short-lived as his endless trips to London for treatment rendered his position untenable. He was given radium treatment as an experiment and its extraordinary success led him to live to the ripe old age of 90.

Back in his student days, starting in 1912, Stanford had sent Howells to the new Westminster Cathedral which had opened in 1903. Richard Terry was putting on pioneering performances of Renaissance polyphony with his already celebrated choir. This deepened Howells's love for music of this period and led to the earliest professional performances of some of his choral compositions, including his *Mass in the Dorian Mode*. Not able to serve in the armed forces because of his illness, and



Kindred spirits:
Howells with Vaughan
Williams in 1956

After Michael's death, everything Howells wrote related to the memory of his son

rendered penniless having left Salisbury, Howells was awarded a generous grant by the Carnegie Trust, which had just published his remarkable Piano Quartet, to help Terry edit Tudor church music. Everything he did at this time fed his creative imagination and showed him a compositional path which, while paying homage to a distant past, also allowed him to develop a style which became so uniquely his own.

An early success were the *Three Carol Anthems*, written in 1918 and showing his keen feeling for words. 'Here is the Little Door', 'A Spotless Rose' and 'Sing Lullaby' remain staples of the choral repertory for Christmas all over the world. The sensuous final cadence of 'A Spotless

Rose' caused Patrick Hadley to write to Howells that 'brainwave it certainly is, but it is much more than that. It is a stroke of genius. I should like, when my time comes, to pass away to that magical cadence'.

Things were not to continue with such unruffled professional progress for long, however. In 1925, his Second Piano Concerto, commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, was premiered in the Queen's Hall. His decidedly contemporary approach led to a mixed reception for the piece and immediate withdrawal from publication by the over-sensitive Howells.

In 1932 Howells wrote his beautiful unaccompanied Requiem to which his six-year-old son Michael contributed a middle C in the manuscript score. Three years later, Michael would be dead of a virulent form of polio. After his death, everything Howells wrote related in some form or other to the memory of his son.

Four works stand out in this way: *Hymnus Paradisi*, written at Howells's daughter Ursula's suggestion to help him exorcise the ghost of the boy. Based

HOWELLS *Life & Times*

1892

LIFE: The youngest of six children, Herbert Howells is born in **Lydney, Gloucestershire**. His father, a decorator and builder, plays the organ at the local church.

TIMES: Liverpool Football Club is founded by John Houlding, owner of a pitch at Anfield, after he has fallen out with its current tenants, Everton FC.

1935

LIFE: He is left devastated when his nine-year-old son, Michael, contracts polio while on holiday and dies at home three days later. Michael is buried in Gloucestershire.

TIMES: With his health in decline, **Ramsey MacDonald** resigns as Prime Minister. He is replaced by Stanley Baldwin, who begins his third term in the post.



1941

LIFE: Howells takes up the post of acting organist at St John's College, Cambridge, taking over from Robin Orr, who is away on wartime service with the RAF. He remains until 1945.

TIMES: As Germany's Luftwaffe launches a series of air raids on the UK's ports and docks, Swansea, Belfast, Plymouth and Glasgow are particularly badly hit.

1964

LIFE: His unaccompanied *Motet on the Death of President Kennedy* is premiered in Washington on the first anniversary of Kennedy's assassination.



TIMES: Featuring groups including The Rolling Stones (with **Mick Jagger**, left), The Hollies and, at Number One, The Beatles, *Top of the Pops* is broadcast on BBC TV for the first time.

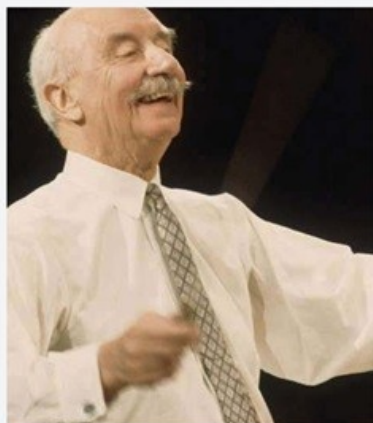


1912

LIFE: Following in the footsteps of his friend **Ivor Gurney**, he wins a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where his teachers

include Hubert Parry and CV Stanford.

TIMES: Beaten in the race to reach the South Pole by the Norwegian Roald Amundsen, Captain Robert Scott and his team perish in a blizzard on their return journey.



1983

LIFE: Howells dies aged 90 on 23 February, the day after the death of conductor **Sir Adrian Boult**, a close personal friend.

TIMES: Six robbers break into the Brink's-Mat warehouse at Heathrow Airport and make off with £26m worth of gold, diamonds and cash, most of which is never recovered.

on the music of the Requiem to which Michael had contributed that single note, it was kept as a private document until 1950, when Howells conducted the first performance at Gloucester Cathedral to universal acclaim.

Just after the third anniversary, in September 1938, of Michael's death, Howells wrote the Psalm Prelude Set 2 No. 1; there is nothing else quite like this in the entire organ repertory. It's essentially a tone-poem based on the text from the first verse of Psalm 130, 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord', which inspires an incandescent, powerfully affecting outpouring of grief.

1964's *Motet on the Death of President Kennedy*, one of the finest unaccompanied motets of the 20th century, is also connected to Michael through its text. 'Take him, earth for cherishing' was used as the dedication in the *Hymnus Paradisi*, and seen by Howells therefore as a deeply personal gift to Kennedy.

And the *Stabat Mater*, arguably Howells's greatest work, was premiered in November 1965. The subject matter is the grieving mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross. Howells's inspiration was taken from Michelangelo's *Pietà*, the sculpture of the dead Jesus lying across his mother's knees. The link is obvious and shows how, even after 30 years, his own grief is still powerfully present. Other works such as the Concerto for Strings, with its slow movement dedicated jointly to Elgar and Michael's memory, and the *Sequence for St Michael*, with its bare-faced shouts of 'Michael' at its opening, witness this ever-present obsession.

Howells, then, is a composer whose music stirs profound emotional reactions from performers and audiences alike. He is at last finding his proper place in the extraordinary pantheon of British composers of the first half of the 20th century who gave this country its unique musical voice. At this distance in time it is difficult to realise just how modern a voice Howells's was. But that atavistic sense shared with Vaughan Williams of how a long distant past can help shape a deeply original musical present was one of Howells's great gifts to future generations, and it can be found in the rich wholeness of his complete compositional output. 🕊

GETTY, ALAMY



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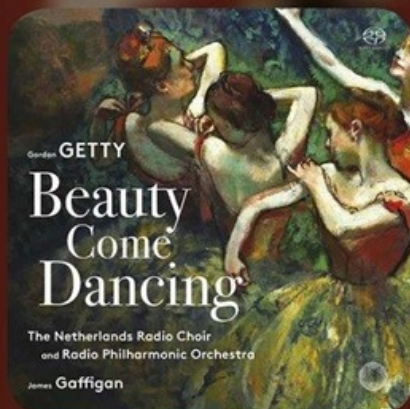
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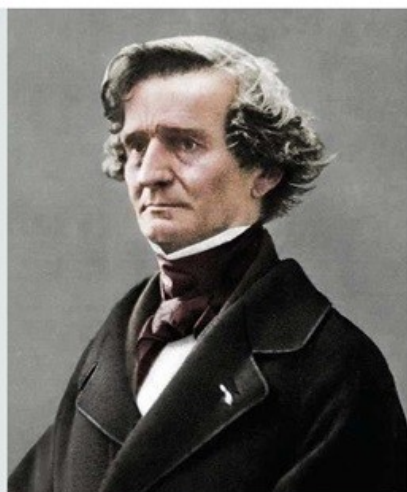


PENTATONE

L'enfance du Christ

Hector Berlioz

George Hall listens in appropriately hushed reverence as he makes his selection of the finest recordings of Berlioz's festive-themed oratorio



The composer

Berlioz had just turned 50 when he began putting the final touches to *L'enfance du Christ*, but had already packed quite enough for one lifetime into those five decades. Winner of the prestigious Prix de Rome for composition in 1830, he had been inspired by his infatuation for one woman, Harriet Smithson, to write his groundbreaking *Symphonie fantastique*, then driven to murderous intent by his love for another, Marie Moke – mercifully, he aborted his plans to kill her and her fiancé. While *Symphonie fantastique* had been a roaring success, 1838's *Benvenuto Cellini* then provided him with his first operatic failure.

The work

At a Parisian card party in the autumn of 1850, Hector Berlioz was plainly bored. His host, the architect Louis-Joseph Duc, suggested he while away the time by writing a short piece. As an album leaf the composer produced a four-part *Andantino* for organ, then decided that it needed a text. 'It became', he later wrote, 'the chorus of shepherds in Bethlehem saying their farewells to the infant Jesus as the Holy Family prepared to leave for Egypt'.

Originally he intended to sign the piece with the name 'Duc', in honour of his host, but instead he invented a 17th-century choirmaster at the Ste-Chappelle called Pierre Ducré and attributed the chorus to him. At a Société Philharmonique concert which he conducted on November 12 1850, the *Shepherds' Farewell* went down well, and equally at a repeat performance. It was Duc who gave away the secret of the piece's true authorship.

Meanwhile Berlioz decided to add movements on either side of it – a fugal overture in modal style and a section called 'Le Repos de la Sainte Famille' (The Holy Family at Rest). Together these now formed a small cantata or – as Berlioz termed it – a 'mystère'; entitled *La fuite en Égypte* (The Flight into Egypt), it received its first performance in Leipzig on December 10 1853.

But Berlioz had not finished with the work: having expanded it



once, he did so again. In January 1854 he composed the bulk of the sequel to *La fuite en Égypte*, which was eventually called 'L'arrivée à Saïs' (Arrival at Saïs). Then he decided that together these needed a preceding section, 'which will have as its subject the massacre of the innocents', as he explained in a letter to his friend Franz Liszt. By July 1854 he had completed this new introduction – 'Le songe d'Hérode' (Herod's Dream) – and the score was finally complete.

It had taken nearly four years, but the wait proved worth it. Despite having been put off the idea of promoting his own works in Paris through incurring financial losses in the past, Berlioz resolved once again to take the risk. *L'enfance du Christ* (The childhood of Christ) was premiered under his baton at Paris's Salle Herz on 10 December 1854. It was a major success, with many people unable to buy tickets and the audience giving the composer-conductor a warm-hearted ovation.



3

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Biblical scenes: Giorgione's *Adoration of the Shepherds*; (opposite) Paris's Salle Herz, which hosted the work's premiere; (below left) poet Alfred de Vigny attended the premiere



Among those present were fellow composers Verdi, Gounod and Ambroise Thomas and the poet Alfred de Vigny. Berlioz later wrote of 'encores, recalls, interruptions in the middle of numbers due to the emotion of the audience, tears – nothing was lacking [...] Not in Germany, Russia nor England have I ever witnessed greater fervour'. By the time two further performances had been given the work had earned Berlioz several thousand francs.

It has often been suggested that *L'enfance du Christ* represents a departure for Berlioz in terms of style – at least compared to some of his more gargantuan efforts: the oratorio is relatively small in its demands, with just two of the regular woodwind and brass (though there are three trombones), while the choral writing doesn't need large numbers either. The overall effect is predominantly gentle – pastel-shaded rather than glowing oils.

L'enfance du Christ is gentle overall – pastel-shaded rather than glowing oils

But the subject itself dictated this new approach. As Berlioz himself pointed out in a postscript to his *Memoirs*, 'Some people imagined they could detect in this work a complete change in my manner and style. Nothing could be more mistaken. The subject naturally lent itself to a mild and simple kind of music. That was why they found it more accessible – that and the development of their own taste and powers of understanding. I would have written *L'enfance du Christ* in the same way 20 years ago.'

Following the failure of his *Benvenuto Cellini* at the Paris Opéra back in 1838, and his consequent cold-shouldering by operatic managements, Berlioz remained a frustrated opera composer, and though *L'enfance du Christ* is clearly an oratorio it nevertheless reveals a dramatic quality that is appropriate to its subject as well as imaginatively handled.

This is as evident in the individual characterisations – especially that of the fearfully insecure Herod – plus the stage directions used in several scenes. Berlioz thought of the piece as being conceived 'in the manner of old illuminated missals', and the resulting musical illustrations are extraordinarily vivid.

Turn the page to discover the best recordings of Berlioz's L'enfance du Christ

Reigning supreme:
Colin Davis had few
peers in Berlioz

Three other great recordings



Philippe Herreweghe
(conductor)

Recorded with
the Orchestre des
Champs-Élysées in
1997, Herreweghe's

approach also offers a reminder that Berlioz was a great opera composer, instilling his diverse scenes with a purposeful sense of development and constantly observant of the score's smaller points, in which the choral contributions are perfectly scaled. Paul Agnew savours the Narrator's text while Laurent Naouri provides a psychologically probing Herod. Véronique Gens's Mary is tender and gentle, and Olivier Lallouette's Joseph exhibits a real sense of desperation when rejected by the citizens of Sais. (*Harmonia Mundi HMG 501632/33*)



Matthew Best
(conductor)

Though some may
find the acoustic
over-resonant,
Matthew Best's

1994 performance with the Corydon Singers and Orchestra maintains a sense of drama without tipping over into the overly theatrical. Alastair Miles is a grand-scale Herod and Jean Rigby's Mary conveys maternal warmth and suggests real anxiety when she and Gerald Finley's perfectly matched Joseph find themselves

A vibrant yet intimate account

The best
recording



Colin Davis (conductor)

Soloists; Tenebrae, London Symphony Orchestra
LSO06062SACD

It is in terms of this vivid quality that Colin Davis's third recording of the piece scores particularly highly. A devoted interpreter of the composer's music, of which he was certainly the greatest champion in his day, Davis undertook his final Berlioz cycle as the London Symphony Orchestra's music director – a post he held from 1995–2006.

By then he had already made two recordings of the piece – the first in 1960, with the Goldsbrough Orchestra and soloists including Elsie Morrison, Peter Pears and John Cameron (Decca); and

the second in 1976 with the LSO and principals including Janet Baker, Eric Tappy and Jules Bastin (Philips). Both of these have much to recommend them, but the result of a lifetime's experience of the score and the impetus of a live recording in the Barbican Hall give this final version from 2006 particular electricity.

Colin Davis discovers an authentic rustic quality in the 'Shepherds' Farewell'

Davis brings lightness and lucidity to Berlioz's score – 'it's very delicate chamber music as a whole', he once said – but his performance also reflects the work's operatic or even (as Davis also suggested) cinematic quality, aided by Yann Beuron's crisp, native French-speaking Narrator, while the small scene between Beuron's Centurion and Peter Rose's Polydorus is unusually striking.

Matthew Rose supplies a dark-souled Herod – an individual at the very end of his tether, sombre in expression. Karen Cargill defines Mary with impeccable steadiness and tonal warmth, while William Dazeley responds with a Joseph of equivalent quality and Peter Rose evokes the hospitable Ishmaelite Father in the final scene with a broad generosity of tone.

The luxurious choir is Tenebrae, whose thorough musicianship and ample yet varied tone form an ideal combination; Davis also discovers an authentic rustic quality to complement the choral richness of the famous 'Shepherds' Farewell'.

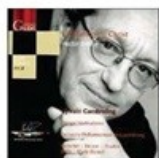
unwelcome refugees in Egypt, where Gwynne Howell's vocal largesse as the Ishmaelite Father embodies his generosity of spirit. (*Hyperion CDD22067*)



Roger Norrington
(conductor)

In this 2002 recording, Norrington and his Stuttgart forces capture the atmosphere of every scene, and shape the score with insight and tenderness. Mark Padmore is the plangent-toned, interpretatively concentrated Narrator, with Christiane Oelze a limpid, fleshy-voiced Mary, Christopher Maltman a fluent and lyrical Joseph, and Ralf Lukas an almost melancholy Herod – viewed, as it were, from the inside out. The result is a consistently characterful performance. (*Hänssler HAEN93091*)

And one to avoid...



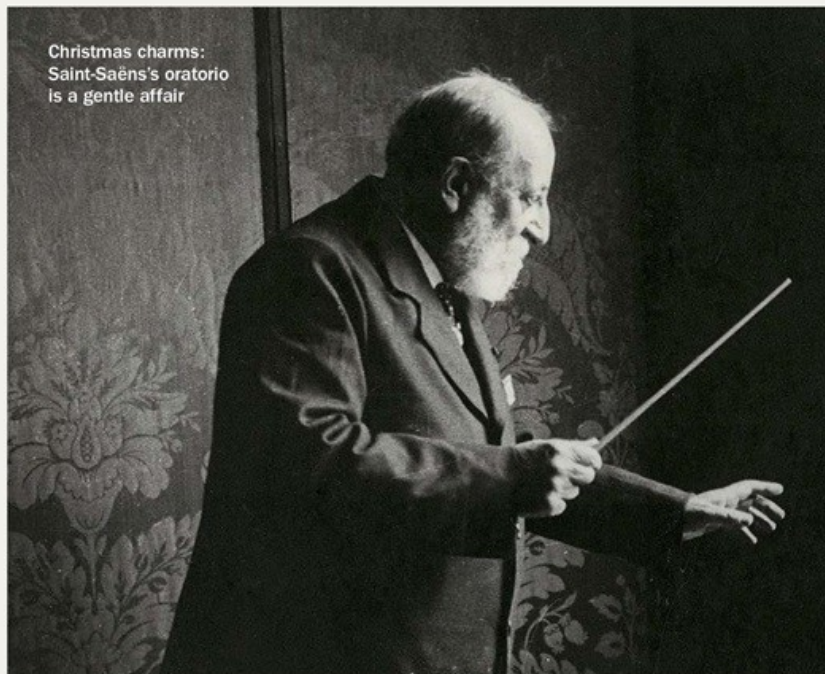
Sylvain Cambreling's 2009 recording again employs Yann Beuron as his Narrator, though the remaining soloists

are not in the same league: Jane Henschel's heavyweight Mary is relentless, while the Joseph is woolly, the Father sometimes unsteady, and the Herod inclined to blowsiness. Nor is the Belgian conductor as pictorially vivid as his colleagues in painting the atmosphere of individual scenes, while overall rhythmic control and precision of ensemble are both less consistent.

Throughout the performance conductor and orchestra enter enthusiastically into the characteristically Berlioz's distinctive, subtle and complex soundworld, with its rich palette of carefully selected colours and a fineness of detail that rewards focussed listening.

While there's never any sense of hurry in his interpretation, Davis nonetheless always manages to keep the score on the move, even in the delightful playfulness of the trio for two flutes and harp in the final scene: this is a point when – in the wrong hands – the score can seem to sag. Colin Davis's are very much the right hands.

Christmas charms:
Saint-Saëns's oratorio
is a gentle affair



Continue the journey...

*We suggest works to explore after Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ**

Four years after the premiere of *L'enfance du Christ*, **Camille Saint-Saëns** – 23 years old, but already a formidably accomplished composer – penned his ten-movement *Christmas Oratorio* in just under a fortnight. Scored for soloists, choir, strings, harp and organ, and with texts drawn from various books of the Bible, it offers a tranquil, reflective account of the Nativity. (Mainz Bach Choir and Orchestra/Hellmann; *Profil PH05023*)

Saint-Saëns was positively ancient, mind, compared to **Georges Bizet** who

was still in his teens when his cantata *Clovis et Clotilde* won him the Prix de Rome in 1857. The work is based on the true story of Clovis, a fifth-century Frankish king who was convinced by his wife, Clotilde, to convert to Christianity and was baptised on Christmas Day. As the Prix de Rome judges clearly agreed, it is both lyrical and really rather charming. (Orchestre National de Lille/Casadesus; *Naxos 8.572270*)

While it's tempting to think of **César Franck** spending every waking hour weaving his chromatic magic in a Parisian organ loft, he did, of course, venture into other musical territory. Completed in 1879, his oratorio *Les*

Beatitudes is, at nearly two hours long, one of his most substantial works, and isn't short on drama. As the title implies, the text is taken from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount as told in St Matthew's Gospel. (Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart/Rilling; *Hänssler HAEN98548*)

The Beatitudes also make a fleeting appearance in 'After Epiphany', the central part of *Christus*, **Franz Liszt's** large-scale oratorio that received its first performance in 1873. As Liszt's narrative takes us from Christ's birth to his death, Parts I and III –

'Christmas Oratorio' and 'Passion and Resurrection' – do pretty much what they say on the tin. (Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart/Rilling; *Hänssler HAEN98121*)

Finally, for another work which devotes its attentions entirely to the events of the Nativity, try *Der Stern von Bethlehem* ('The Star of Bethlehem'), an 1890 Christmas cantata by the German **Josef Rheinberger**. The muted opening on bassoon and strings sets the tone of the work nicely – though there are moments of ebullience, this is, like the Saint-Saëns, largely placid, peaceful stuff. (Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau et al; Bavarian Radio Chorus/Heger; *Carus CARUS83111*)

Composed in his teens,
Bizet's Clovis et Clotilde is
both lyrical and charming

Reviews

110 CDs, Books & DVDs rated by expert critics

Welcome



From a heap of Handel and a hint of Holst to a helping of the Hallé, this month's review pages are full of heavenly delights. There's a new recording of a perennial

favourite by Rachmaninov – which is a must-listen – plus the latest releases from Bryn Terfel, Carolyn Sampson, James Ehnes and Howard Goodall.

If you're looking for the perfect soundtrack to your festivities then you must take a look at our 'Christmas Round-up' for inspiration, or head to the Brief Notes pages where you'll find a further flurry of seasonal sounds, sacred and secular. Christmas shopping is covered too with plenty of gift ideas, but as stocking-fillers go, the new 222-disc Bach box set will be a bit of a stretch (see a full-page review on p101). It might be easier simply to put it under the tree.

Michael Beek *Reviews Editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Michael Beek, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Geoff Brown, Anthony Burton, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchon, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Julian Haylock, Claire Jackson, Daniel Jaffé, Erica Jeal, Berta Joncus, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Roger Nichols, Bayan Northcott, Jeremy Pound, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Kate Wakeling, Barry Witherden

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★ Outstanding
★★★★ Excellent
★★★ Good
★★ Disappointing
★ Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

An exploration and liberation of JS Bach

Víkingur Ólafsson's latest album opens the door to new possibilities for the great composer's music, says **Michael Church**



JS Bach

Prelude and Fuguetta in G major; Organ Sonata No. 4; The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I (Excerpts); Concerto in D minor; Fantasia and Fugue in A minor, and other selected keyboard works

Víkingur Ólafsson (piano)
DG 483 5022 77.25 mins

Having heard Víkingur Ólafsson present a selection from this programme in recital, and having admired the clarity, poise and warmth of his playing, I expected this recording to be good; but just how good was still a surprise. And it's prefaced by an essay which brilliantly explains his rationale. Starting from the

premise that there is no single, correct solution to how JS Bach's keyboard music should be played – the composer left hardly any indications – this young Icander points out that every element is up for debate, including tempos, dynamics, proportions and articulation: 'We performers must weigh our knowledge of period style against our individual and inescapably contemporary sensibility; our faithfulness to what we believe to have been the composer's intention against our freedom to discover possibilities in the music that the composer could never have foreseen – some of them made available by the modern instrument. There is no single, correct solution.' And this, he says, is a strangely liberating realisation: the performer must necessarily become a co-creator, but one who stands on the shoulders of the great co-creators who have gone before them.

His own precursors have been, in turn, Edwin Fischer, Rosalyn Tureck, Dinu Lipatti,

BBC music
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Prism playing:
Ólafsson's Bach
is multifaceted

Glenn Gould and Martha Argerich, to each of whom he acknowledges a debt; as a transcriber, he owes a debt to Busoni, August Stradal, Rachmaninov, Wilhelm Kempff and Alexander Siloti (whose work his own transcription – of *Widerstehe doch der Sünde* BWV 54 – most clearly echoes). Bach now, he says, generally sounds quite different from Bach 30 years ago, and still more different from Bach 50 years ago. 'In that sense,' he says, 'his music is contemporary rather than classical.' One might say that all this is blindingly obvious, but to have it so lucidly stated is very much appreciated.

Intermingling celebrated transcriptions with some of Bach's preludes, fugues,

inventions, sinfonias, partita movements and with the A minor Variations BWV 989 which form the structural heart of this performance – this disc really does feel like a performance – Ólafsson

I expected this recording to be good; but just how good was still a surprise

creates a ravishing musical sequence. Every track has its own allure, and many reflect a virtuosity which is never flaunted; he treats the preludes and fugues as though they had been conceived as tone-poems or études: his fleet, slightly détaché account of the C minor prelude from Book I of the 48 is

a miracle of delicate control, and his account of the Fugue in A minor BWV 904 has austere grandeur. Highlights among the transcriptions include Kempff's finger-twister on 'Nun freut euch' (here made to sound as easy as a walk in the park), the adagio from Stradal's version of the Organ Sonata No. 4 (sounding astonishingly organ-like), and Ólafsson's account of Busoni's 'Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland', which ventures through dark realms with a measured tread.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the monthly **BBC Music Magazine Podcast** available free on iTunes or classical-music.com

An interview with Vikigur Ólafsson



How do you make Bach sound so fresh?

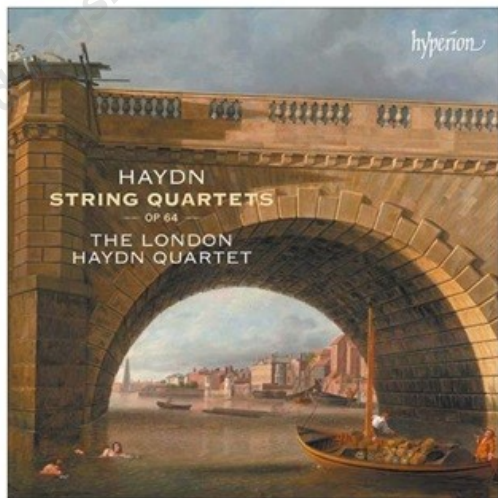
I think Bach is always the future. He has this incredible ability to adapt to different generations; he becomes a mirror for them, and for every individual as well. When you open a Bach score the structures are so miraculously detailed and, on the other hand, so minimal – you don't get any instructions how to make sense of it from a performance perspective. You have to find your own way with Bach for it to be successful. If we don't make Bach sound fresh we are doing something wrong.

Some of the transcriptions are revelatory...

The Organ Sonata is interesting. I must admit that I did not know it, and I thought it was incredible. I was about to make my own transcription when I found Stradal's and I had to include it, but how to approach it? Did I want it to sound like an organ on the piano? Or did I want it to be its own piece? It takes on new qualities on the piano, but I try to capture some of the acoustical elements of a cathedral through texture and half or quarter pedal.

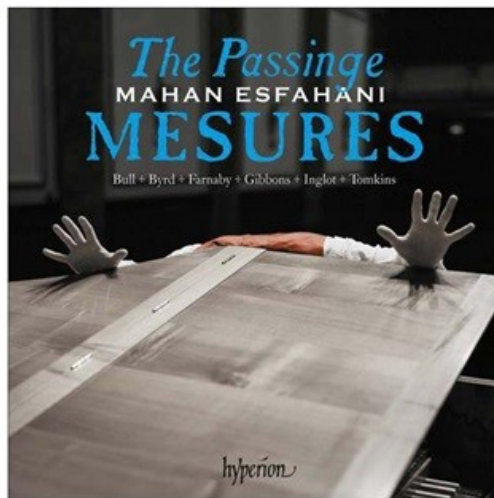
What would Bach make of a modern piano?

I think he would be delighted with the possibilities. Of course, it's a guessing game, but he was immensely interested in developments of instruments. He was always looking to expand possibilities in anything he did – in musical structures, or the way he wrote for different instruments. I have a feeling if he had encountered the modern grand piano in all its magnificent beauty, he would be very enthusiastic. He might write differently; who knows?



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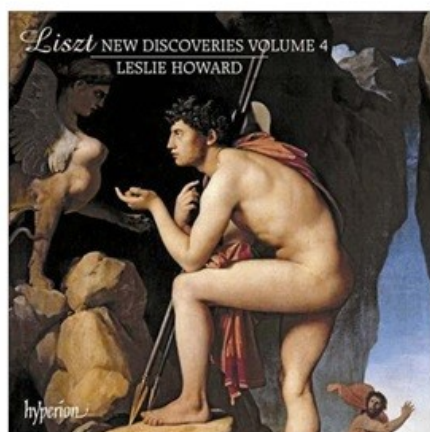
The London Haydn Quartet's recordings of their namesake continue to win universal plaudits, consistently delivering—in the words of *The Guardian*—'too many pleasures to enumerate. Try for yourself.'



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This sensational recital—featuring some of the greatest keyboard music to emerge from these islands—is the perfect vehicle for Mahan Esfahani's abundant talents.

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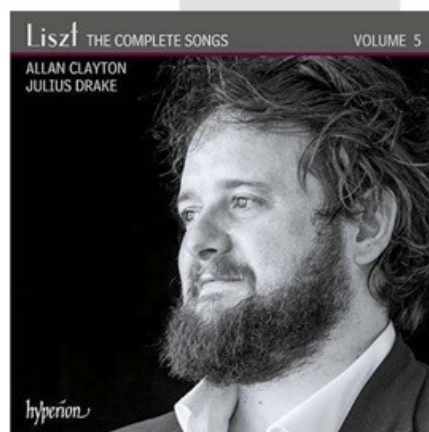
CDA68247 Available now

A fascinating compendium of first thoughts, alternative versions and lost works: the fruits of Leslie Howard's assiduous fossicking in the Lisztian workshop.



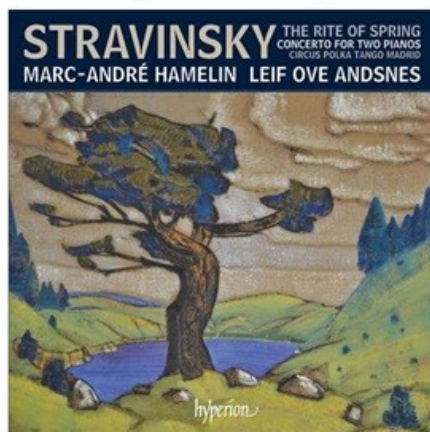
CDA68265 Available now

Stephen Rice and his Brabant Ensemble introduce us to another lesser-known contemporary and compatriot of Josquin.



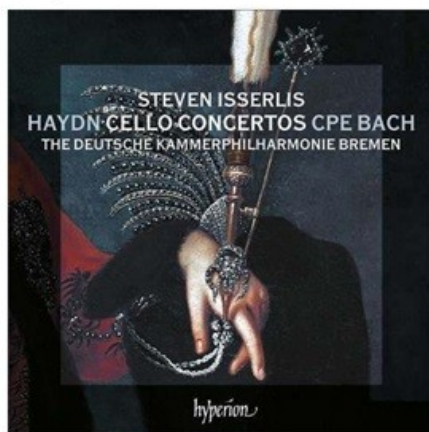
CDA68179 Available now

Allan Clayton demonstrates his exceptional versatility with a Liszt programme of eighteen songs, all of which make prodigious demands of the performers.



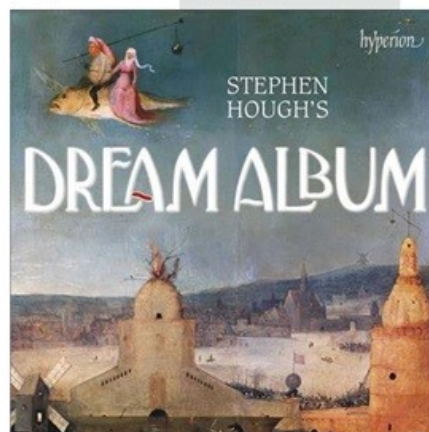
CDA68189 Available now

'A strong candidate for Disc of the Year, never mind of the Month' (Gramophone)



CDA68162 Available now

'Isserlis's 1998 recording remains classy stuff, but this has superbly trumped it' (Gramophone)



CDA68176 Available now

'I could drop the needle pretty much anywhere and enjoy what emerged ... a delight' (Record Review, BBC Radio 3)

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Christmas choice

Terry Blain takes in some of the very best of this year's seasonal recordings

Christmas round-up

'Resonemus Laudibus' dates from the 14th century, and is one of the earliest Christmas songs to be written down on paper. **The Sixteen's** ebulliently pulsing



performance gets **A Renaissance Christmas** off to an energetic start, and the tune's legacy is traced

through later settings by Eccard, Handl and De Lassus. The darker elements of the Christmas story are examined too, notably in George Kirbye's 'Vox in Rama', a lament for Herod's slaughter of the innocents. This is given a moodily atmospheric reading by Harry Christophers's singers, as is the brooding plainchant 'Crudelis Herodes'. (**CORO COR16167** ★★★★★)

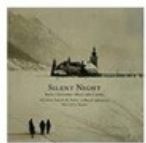
Five years ago the **Bach Collegium Japan** started performing an annual Christmas concert, and **A Christmas Greeting** contains highlights of the repertoire presented. Mainly it is traditional



carols – 'Silent Night', 'In Dulci Jubilo', 'The First Noël' – in arrangements by Masato

Suzuki. These are occasionally quirky – 'Adeste Fideles' begins with what sounds like bleating sheep imitations from the singers. The performances are typically classy, and punctuated by a selection of Daquin's 'Noëls' for solo organ, played with peppery registrations by Suzuki. (**BIS2291** ★★★★★)

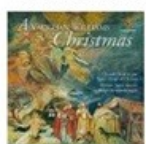
Silent Night may be a conventional title, but the sounds on this **Hirundo Maris** disc are anything but. Specialising in music of the medieval and Baroque



periods, he drapes a patina of tingling instrumentation – Bagpipes, harps, a cittern, dobro, cornett and hardingfele – around Christmas songs from the European tradition. 'The Holly and the Ivy' has a winning folksy twang, while 'The Wexford Carol' is more minimal

and introverted. Both benefit from the lissome, understated vocalism of soloists Arianna Savall and Petter Uiland. Even that over-roasted old chestnut 'Stille Nacht' sounds fresh in their crystalline arrangement. Immaculate musicianship, with spicy sonic flavourings. (**Deutsche HM19075878972** ★★★★★)

Among the many folk songs that Vaughan Williams collected were carols, and a group of them is included in the warmly entertaining



A Vaughan Williams Christmas. VW's arrangement of 'The Truth Sent from Above' is the

pick of them, not least for baritone Angus McPhee's eloquent solo. The **Nine Carols for Male Voices** are world premiere recordings of arrangements Vaughan Williams made for World War II troops stationed in Iceland. A dark-toned, introspective harmonisation of 'Coventry Carol' and a jaunty 'I Saw Three Ships' stand out particularly. Clear-toned, welcoming performances. (**Albion ABCD035** ★★★★★)

The pulsing, fidgety rhythms of Adrian Peacock's 'Venite, Gaudete!' mark the **ORA Singers** out as a chamber choir of high accomplishment. The technical accuracy is exceptional and the sound smoothly blended in **The**



Mystery of Christmas. Occasionally an element of inhibition threatens: both

Tallis's 'Videte miraculum' and Byrd's 'O magnum mysterium' could be more boldly contoured dynamically. The programme interestingly pairs ancient carol tunes such as 'Nova, nova' and 'There is no rose' with treatments of the same melodic material by contemporary composers. Of these Cecilia McDowall's 'Now may we sing' is particularly enjoyable, and draws a nimbly incisive performance from Suzi Digby and her singers. (**Harmonia Mundi HMM905305** ★★★★★)

CHRISTMAS CHOICE

Shining very brightly

There's stillness and great joy in this standout festive offering from London's young choir

Ferris wheel:
Sonoro surround
their conductor



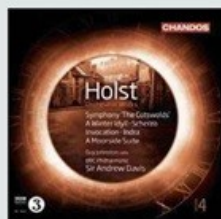
Christmas With Sonoro

Sonoro/Neil Ferris

Resonus RES10226 59:08 mins

The London-based chamber choir Sonoro was founded just two years ago, yet has already developed a strong individual identity. It is immediately evident in the brightly rhythmic account of Malcolm Archer's 'A little child there is yborn' which opens their new disc. There's real joy in the interpretation, and the blend is not over-homogenised – you can hear distinctive individual voices without ensemble being disrupted. Pin-point layering of dynamics creates a sharp sense of mystery and drama in Michael Higgins's multi-layered setting of 'The Angel Gabriel', and the same attention to nuance enlivens Higgins's fulsomely-enjoyable arrangement of 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day'. Sonoro has just 17 singers, but they have no difficulty achieving a supple continuity of texture in Sally Beamish's intimately expressive 'In the Stillness'. Fintan O'Carroll's 'Suantraí ár Slánaitheora' is likewise quietly seductive, and has a delectably limpid solo from soprano Rebecca Lea. Neil Ferris's conducting is full of interpretive touches which illuminate the music without compromising the spontaneity of the singing. The sound quality is ideally transparent, and further enhances enjoyment of this outstandingly refreshing recital. ★★★★★

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE



A rich seam of symphonic wonders is plundered

Malcolm Hayes enjoys the BBC Philharmonic's latest volume of Holst's bejewelled orchestral offerings



Mellow cello:
Guy Johnston's turn is
a smooth highlight

Holst

A Winter Idyll; Symphony in F (The Cotswolds); Invocation; A Moorside Suite; Indra; Scherzo
Guy Johnston (cello); BBC Philharmonic/Andrew Davis
Chandos CHSA 5192 (hybrid CD/SACD) 77:02 mins

This latest instalment of Chandos's survey of Holst's orchestral works is far more than a predictable beachcomber's delight. The quality of the performances is a feast in itself, the BBC Philharmonic playing with world-class precision that exactly matches the ceaseless quest for clarity in Holst's idiom. The recorded sound, too, conveys needlepoint detail within a natural-sounding, non-clinical ambience.

The two earliest works are the pre-1900 *A Winter Idyll* and the *Cotswolds* Symphony – each showing comprehensive mastery of the fresh-air orchestral style of Dvořák or Grieg, and neither conveying any connection between choice of title and the music itself. The strongest material is the Symphony's slow movement, 'Elegy in memoriam William Morris', although the music's sincerity of feeling comes across as generalised rather than particular. Far more

impressive is *Indra*, a symphonic poem inspired by Holst's growing interest in Sanskrit mythology. His daughter and biographer, Imogen Holst, later made much of what she saw as the near-malign influence of Wagner on her father's development. *Indra* indicates an opposite situation: concisely structured as ever, the music's potent expression and dramatic flair

The quality of the performances is a feast in itself

show how much the Wagner phenomenon had helped to get Holst out of his head and to free up his confidence as an artist.

Guy Johnston's mellow-toned delivery of the poised and

beautifully scored *Invocation* is followed by Holst's own string-orchestra arrangement, unperformed until 1994, of his *Moorside Suite* (originally for brass band). And his last completed music, the *Scherzo* from a planned Symphony, is as tautly compressed and individual as anything he wrote.

**PERFORMANCE
RECORDING**

★★★★★
★★★★★



Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the *BBC Music Magazine* website at www.classical-music.com

Beethoven • R Strauss

Beethoven: Symphony No. 3;
R Strauss: Horn Concerto No. 1
William Caballero (horn);
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/
Manfred Honeck
*Reference Recordings FR-728 (hybrid CD/
SACD) 65:17 mins*



I can't remember the last time I was so thrilled by a Beethoven symphony performance as

by this brilliantly-recorded release. On a technical level alone, the orchestra's playing is absolutely stunning. The Pittsburgh strings deliver crisp articulation combined with Central European warmth of sound in tandem with wonderfully defined and characterful playing from solo woodwind and brass. But it's Manfred Honeck's interpretation that really gripped me. His ambitious objective is to uncover the radical novelties of the *Eroica* as if experienced for the first time. Although this may seem a tall order, Honeck nonetheless manages to achieve an amazing degree of freshness in his approach without any exaggerated gestures or idiosyncratic mannerisms. Employing a large orchestra, he takes infinite care to ensure that clarity and variety of texture remain paramount and that as wide as possible dynamic levels are faithfully observed.

Throughout the *Eroica*'s tempestuous journey, Honeck is extraordinarily receptive to some inner details of the score. Two notable examples are the uncanny premonition on the third horn of the fate theme from the Fifth Symphony, which appears near the end of the Funeral March, and Beethoven's vivid folk-like scoring for clarinets and violas in the Hungarian style variation of the finale.

It may seem a bit of a let-down to follow such a compelling performance of the *Eroica* with Strauss's far more musically modest First Horn Concerto. But if you are prepared to draw breath and momentarily press the pause button, there's much to enjoy in William Caballero's virtuosic projection of the solo part. *Erik Levi*

**PERFORMANCE
RECORDING**

★★★★★
★★★★★

Elgar

The Wand of Youth – Suites Nos 1 & 2; Salut d'Amour; Nursery Suite; Chanson de Nuit
Hallé/Mark Elder

Hallé CDHLL 7548 71:18 mins



The Hallé sustains an Elgar tradition dating all the way back to its premiere of his

First Symphony under Hans Richter in 1908. And here it is to be heard in full bloom in the two sets of exquisitely characterised miniatures Elgar worked up in 1907 from incidental music he composed in his childhood, under the title of *The Wand of Youth*. These are exemplary accounts with well-chosen tempos and loving care over Elgar's every detailed nuance from Sir Mark Elder, sparkling woodwind in the sprightlier pieces like 'The Little Bells' and that special tone of tender nostalgia from the Hallé strings in such numbers as the 'Slumber Scene', enhanced by the clear yet spacious recording.

Despite its many charms, and one knock-out number 'The Wagon Passes', the *Nursery Suite* composed virtually at the end of Elgar's career is perhaps less genuinely inspired than the earlier child-derived pieces, and just occasionally, one wishes that Elder's glowing account could move along a little more lightly. The fill-ups are the orchestral versions of two of Elgar's most popular early salon pieces, sumptuously done. That poignant miniature *Dream Children* (1902), one of Elgar's most self-revealing scores, might have served better, but the Hallé have already included it in another release. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mahler

Symphony No. 3

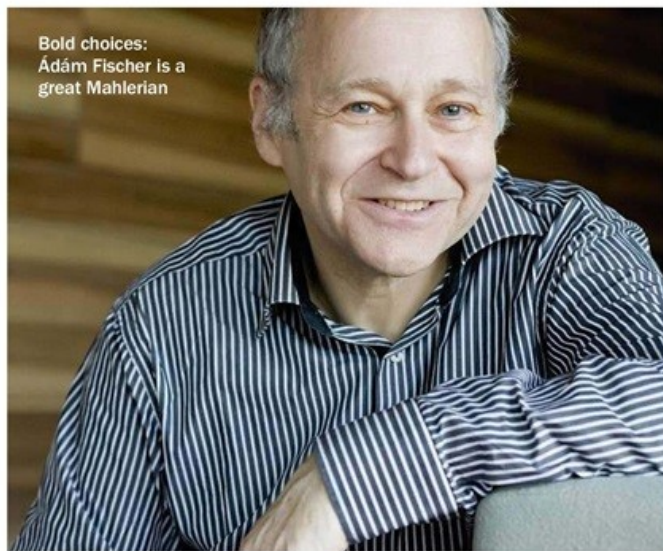
Anna Larsson (contralto); Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra/Ádám Fischer
Avi 8553399 95:51 mins (2 discs)



Magisterial power in sombre and radiant marches, the subtlest rubato in the old-new

minuet which follows, establish Ádám (not to be confused with younger brother Iván) Fischer as one of the greatest living Mahler

Bold choices:
Ádám Fischer is a
great Mahlerian



conductors. What he does with the slow-movement finale may not be to all tastes, but it's bold. He attempts to emulate the gut timbre of Mahler's time, with less vibrato, on metal strings in a less extreme way than relative lightweight Roger Norrington. That makes for a bolder kind of nobility as the great melodic line unfolds at first – after all, when your players aren't those of the Vienna or Berlin Philharmonics, there's no point trying to beat them at their own game – but the climaxes are uniquely powerful, and Fischer saves the biggest for the last, just before the final victory parade.

Both here and in the wild surges of the forest beasts in the central scherzo, there's a live excitement that can't be achieved at the same pitch in the recording studio. The posthorn solo in the heart of the wood is supremely artistic (from Frank Ludemann), forthright funeral trombone in the first movement likewise (the collective brass are very impressive indeed, world-class). The characterful woodwind solos include some heartbreakingly beautiful oboe playing. Only Anna Larsson, so often the contralto of choice for Nietzsche's 'Midnight Song', has lost some of the steadiness of yore, but she goes with Fischer's evocative meaning.

Engineering renders the rainbow colours of this most comprehensive of Mahler symphonies to perfection. *David Nice*

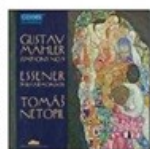
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mahler

Symphony No. 9

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra/
Tomáš Netopil

Oehms Classics OC1890 82:33 mins



What wonders Central European conductors are achieving with lesser-known German

orchestras. I listened to this immediately after Ádám Fischer's magnificent Düsseldorf Mahler Three, and there is so much to admire in the Essen playing. Tomáš Netopil has stood rather in the shadow of his slightly younger fellow Czech Jakub Hruša, but he knows how to steer an ensemble through the greatest of Mahler symphonies. The biggest challenges are the most impressively met: those cataclysmic welters in the colossal first movement, always clear but at the same time powerfully on the move, the last emotional climax of the farewell finale and its final, whispered laying to rest.

At 43, Netopil may not yet have 'raised his lyre...in the realm of the shades', Rilke's prescription for true greatness. One doesn't as yet sense the manic as the scherzo spins out of control, and the 'Rondo-Burleske' takes time to go wild. The shadows of the grave in the twilight zones of the first movement lack something of the atmosphere of the very greatest performances (Abbado, Haitink). How well he's trained his players, though; the woodwind are exquisite in the dying of the

light, the strings hugely powerful of outline when they need to be, and subtle, too, as they reduce to a sliver of sound. And, as in Düsseldorf, the resident sound engineers do the end result proud – though whether this is a live performance or not isn't stated. As so often, though, the impressive German company Oehms Classics have chosen well for core repertoire. *David Nice*

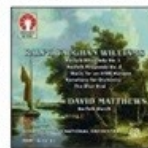
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

D Matthews •
Vaughan Williams

Vaughan Williams: Norfolk Rhapsodies Nos 1 & 2; Music for an EFDS Masque; Variations for Orchestra; The Blue Bird – incidental music; Christmas Overture;

D Matthews: Norfolk March
Royal Scottish National Orchestra/
Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch CDLX7351 (hybrid CD/
SACD) 76:38 mins

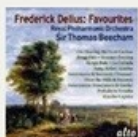


At least 40 minutes – more than half this CD – consists of first recordings: just over ten

minutes of these for a new David Matthews work leaves an impressive amount of 'new' Vaughan Williams. Most curious is the 1913 incidental music for an apparently aborted London production of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*. Through the Englishman's dreamy modal style one may hear a good deal of French influence, including vague thematic recollections of Dukas's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* – appropriate for a fantastical scenario involving dancing loaves, fire and water. But it's not really Vaughan Williams territory, and it's a relief to hear his authentic voice in *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1* given a good, polished performance, if rather short of atmosphere. The second *Rhapsody*, completed by Stephen Hogger, is a curious piece with a foretaste of VW's *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*.

The new David Matthews piece re-imagines a lost Vaughan Williams work, more or less following its detailed programme note. It starts with a very convincing imitation of VW's style; but then, reflecting on the calamity of the First World War, Matthews, as he writes in the accompanying booklet note, makes 'a drastic change from

Reissues Reviewed by David Nice

**Delius Orchestral Favourites**

Alto ALC 1374 (1958-61) 75:15 mins

Thomas Beecham's championship of the Bradford-born master yields a generous treasury, with some contrast (e.g. 'Sleigh Ride') to break the reveries. There may be silkier-sounding recordings, but none so characterful. ★★★★★

**The New Year Concerts 1951-54**

Eloquence 482 7363 154:36 mins (2 discs)

Clemens Krauss was a master of waltz uplift and polka character, with Josef Strauss supreme here. Only Carlos Kleiber's New Year's Day programmes have shone as bright. ★★★★★

**Concertgebouw Lollipops**

Eloquence 482 5650 (1952-68) 159 mins (2 discs)

Random showpieces from Amsterdam. **Bernard Haitink's** sane if not intoxicating choices provide firm ballast. Surprisingly light touches from **Eduard van Beinum**, except for a horrid 'Trumpet Voluntary'. ★★

**Russia - Romance & Drama**

Alto ALC 1371 79:07 mins

Yuri Ahronovitch may have been too eccentric in large-scale symphonies, but what extraordinary character in this ideal Russian collection. Musorgsky's witchy revels and Prokofiev's strutting *Three Oranges* march are highlights. ★★★★★

what Vaughan Williams would have done', and we enter a more violent mid-20th-century world.

Of the rest, VW's Variations, arranged by Gordon Jacob, has been more excitingly recorded by Neville Marriner; and the two folk tune medleys, as edited and completed by Martin Yates, are pleasant – the *Christmas Overture* may make this an appropriate stocking filler.

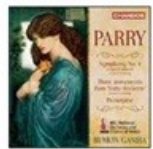
Daniel Jaffé

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

Parry**Symphony No. 4; Suite moderne – excerpts; Proserpine**

BBC National Chorus of Wales & Orchestra/Rumon Gamba
Chandos CHAN10994 74:59 mins



From a speedy glance, this Chandos release timed for the centenary of

Hubert Parry's death might give the impression of sweeping out the cupboard. Drawn entirely from unpublished material edited by Parry expert Jeremy Dibble, these premiere recordings embrace two lighter works and the

original version of a symphony the composer extensively revised. None of the pieces, however, are the musical equivalent of dust. The little ballet with chorus, *Proserpine*, and the selection from *Suite moderne* (modern, that is, in 1886) are immensely appealing, variously graced with gamboling woodwinds, airy textures, and some of Parry's fetching, long-legged melodies. Both works also highlight the refined tones of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in performances perfectly gauged by Rumon Gamba to match the music's elegant charms.

The Symphony of 1889, considerably reworked and tautened 20 years later, needs and gets greater muscle. This is Parry in his Brahmsian mode, particularly in the sturdy, often stern first movement, with intimations of future Elgar slipped in, pre-echoes also evident in the graceful scherzo, later replaced (Elgar indeed was in the audience at its first performance). The Symphony's revised edition, recorded by Chandos in 1990, may be stronger overall (the first movement's new reflective coda is particularly fine), though it would be a poor soul who didn't

feel stirred in the 1889 version by Parry's characteristic mix of serious European purpose and hearty British optimism – a quality aptly reflected by Gamba's forces in the blazing final pages. Is there a Brexit parable here? **Geoff Brown**

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

J Strauss II**Aschenbrödel**

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony

Orchestra/Ernst Theis

CPO 777 950-2 99:05 mins (2 discs)



Although 19th-century ballet scores – most notably Tchaikovsky's and Delibes's

– embraced some of the most delightful orchestral invention of the Romantic era, they were often treated in cavalier fashion by choreographers and producers, with numbers cut, inserted, adapted and re-ordered with impunity according to whim. Johann Strauss's *Aschenbrödel* (Cinderella) proved no exception. When Strauss died suddenly in June 1899 the score was still incomplete and it was left to ballet-opera composer Joseph Bayer to collate all his sketches and drafts as the composer originally intended. This version was never performed, however, and by the time it was premiered two years later it had an entirely new scenario and was accordingly reassembled by Bayer. Most subsequent productions were based on this new version, which in a revised edition by Douglas Gamley received an outstanding recording by Richard Bonynge and the National Philharmonic (Decca).

This new recording is in effect a world premiere, therefore, as it is based on Michael Rot's painstaking reconstruction of Strauss's original from Bayer's piano score and Strauss's original sketches, which having been considered lost were miraculously rediscovered only a few years ago. Cast in two acts, it boasts a non-stop flow of enchanting ideas, including the principle *Blue Danube* waltz, and is played here by Vienna's ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester and Ernst Theis with an unmistakably Viennese flair for the music's infectious dance rhythms. Refreshingly, Ernst Theis approaches the score as he might

conducting in a dance theatre, with rhythms deftly pointed and Strauss's radiant invention kept lightly on its toes. **Julian Haylock**

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

Tchaikovsky**Symphonies Nos 2 & 3**

London Philharmonic Orchestra/

Vladimir Jurowski

LPO-0109 77:03 mins



Vladimir Jurowski and the London Philharmonic give a delectable account of

Tchaikovsky's usually less favoured Third Symphony. Its five movements can sound discursive, and its four-square finale (its mazurka rhythm prompting the Third's nickname, 'Polish') rather dull. Here the funeral march-like introduction may appear to be given a rather swift and too lightweight account; in fact, this makes clearer the way a motif in the opening gradually transforms into the main *Allegro* theme. Even the oboe's wistful, less obviously symphonic melody that follows is an effective foil to what has gone before. Jurowski's conducting remains purposeful throughout: whether the graceful second and fourth movements, or the expressive *Andante elegiac* third movement, the music is given its due without milking any of its emotion. And the finale is never overbearing, thanks to the LPO's sensitive shaping of its mazurka rhythm.

Not so successful is the less tricky Second Symphony. The brisk first movement is well characterised, but the second movement's jaunty march sets off just too smartly, losing its carefree quality and not allowing the yearning secondary string theme to really breathe. The following scherzo, though not particularly slow, sounds lumbering in comparison, which is surely not at all Tchaikovsky's intention. After this, the finale goes very well, Jurowski even relenting for the final appearance of the secondary lilting string theme and easing the tempo. The Festival Hall sound, though dry-ish, is detailed and characterful enough for one to appreciate Tchaikovsky's wonderful orchestration in both works. **Daniel Jaffé**

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

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Photo: Gabrieli, performing at 'Music
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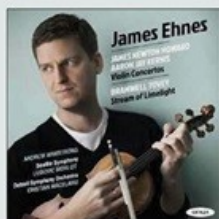
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Michael Beek laps up James Ehnes's latest offering collecting new pieces written especially for him



In the limelight:
James Ehnes
shines brightly

JN Howard • Kernis • B Tovey

Kernis: Violin Concerto; **JN Howard:** Violin Concerto; **B Tovey:** Stream of Limelight

James Ehnes (violin), Andrew Armstrong (piano); Seattle Symphony/Ludovic Morlot; Detroit Symphony Orchestra/Cristian Măcelaru
Onyx ONYX 4189 68:25 mins

James Ehnes is one of the great violinists of the day, so it's no wonder composers are falling over themselves to write new things for him to play. This disc showcases three commissions aimed squarely at the Canadian virtuoso's dazzling skillset. At the centre is a concerto by James Newton Howard, a name cinemagoers will be familiar with – indeed, with a career spanning over three decades, he is one of the most accomplished of Hollywood's composers. The work, which follows a prior 2015 concert commission for the Pacific Symphony (and Ehnes), is lyrical, wildly cavorting and – in the *Andante semplice* second movement – sweetly poignant.

Aaron Jay Kernis's preceding concerto requires Ehnes to delve even deeper into his virtuoso's tool kit.

Ehnes bows, picks and plucks his way to a frenzied finish

With a highly charged first movement, Kernis sets out his stall with intense drama, before a fabulously film noir-ish second movement. Smokey, muted trumpets, a song-like lamentation on the violin and a frisson of kit-percussion make this a standout turn from both composer and soloist. The final movement is a wilder extension of this jazz-tinged mode, and the thrilling final minute-and-a-half sees Ehnes bowing, picking and plucking to a frenzied finish.

Bramwell Tovey's *Streams of Limelight* is a delightful musical conversation between violin and piano that, at times, feels like a silent movie score; the 'dialogue' turns on a dime between hysteria and tender sweetness.

The three recordings here are top notch, particularly the two live concerto performances, and the applause and cheers on those are proof enough of the mastery on display.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website at www.classical-music.com

Beethoven • Mozart

Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 4 (cadenza Harbison); **Mozart:** Piano Concerto No. 14 in E flat, K449; Fantasia in C minor; **Harbison:** Anniversary Waltz David Deveau (piano); Jessica Bodner (viola), Thomas van Dyck (double bass), Borromeo String Quartet
Steinway & Sons 30099 65:09 mins



The four small, perfectly formed piano concertos Mozart composed between K413 and K449 are

perennial delights. In their chamber versions, the players' conversational exchanges and the blend of their timbres achieve a special, intimate atmosphere: the E flat Concerto K449 with its expressive slow movement fares particularly well. Beethoven's Fourth Concerto, though, offers a different concept of soloist-orchestra interaction. Despite the clarity of texture here, the work feels diminished without its orchestral sonorities, even with viola and double bass added to the quartet ensemble. The cadenza by John Harbison presents a refreshing take on the material, but I suspect it's unlikely to become part of any chamber music staple diet.

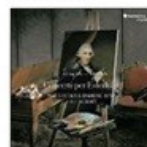
David Deveau plays with a limpid touch, natural sense of flow and deep feeling. There is plenty of genial ensemble playing, though with some rather acidic intonation among the strings. The two short piano solos that complete the disc are welcome rarities: the Harbison *Anniversary Waltz* oozes charm, and the Mozart C minor Fantasia K396 is concentrated, lyrical and beautifully balanced by Deveau. *Jessica Duchen*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Haydn

Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 4; Cello Concerto No. 1

Amandine Beyer (violin), Marco Ceccato (cello); Gli Incogniti
Harmonia Mundi HMM 902314 58:01 mins



Writing concertos was never an activity of central importance to Haydn, as it was to Mozart. With the

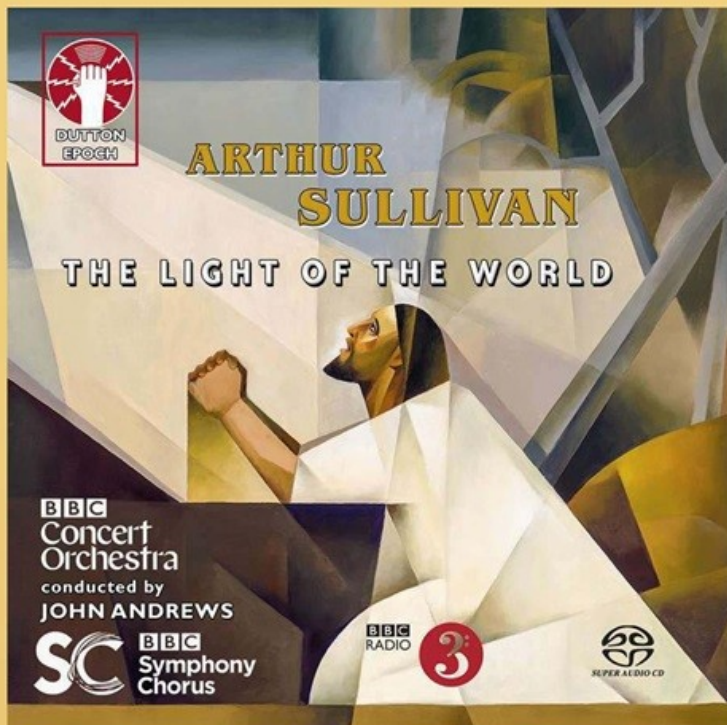
exception of the Trumpet Concerto and the Sinfonia concertante



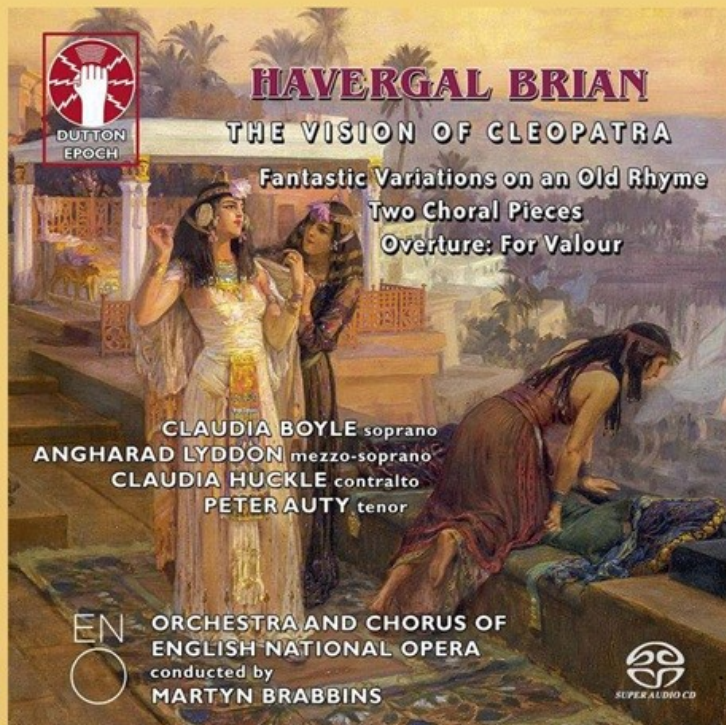
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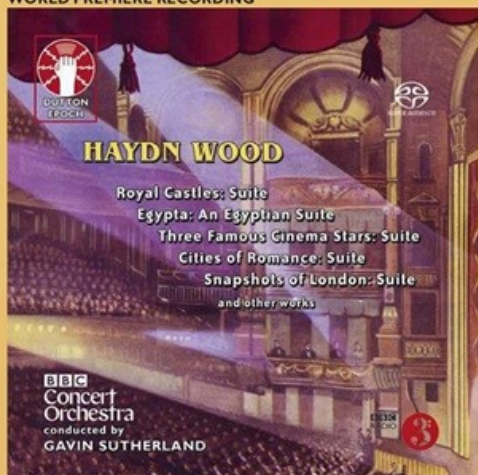
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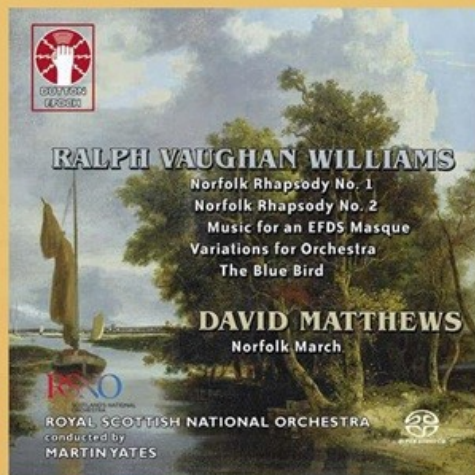
ARTHUR SULLIVAN *The Light of the World* Commissioned for and first produced at the Birmingham Musical Festival of 1873, *The Light of the World* is Arthur Sullivan's great oratorio on the life of Christ. Although regularly performed during the composer's lifetime, changing fashions gradually condemned the work to obscurity. Occasional revivals have failed to make the case for it, primarily because it was not understood that *The Light of the World* is essentially a dramatic work, rather than a purely religious one. When Dutton Epoch and the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society came to record the work, this new understanding enabled a completely different approach to be taken – the result is a vibrant performance by the BBC Symphony Chorus and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by John Andrews. They are supported by the Kinder Children's Choir and a fine team of soloists: Natalya Romaniw and Eleanor Dennis (sopranos), Kitty Whately (contralto), Robert Murray (tenor), Ben McAteer (baritone) and Neal Davies (bass).
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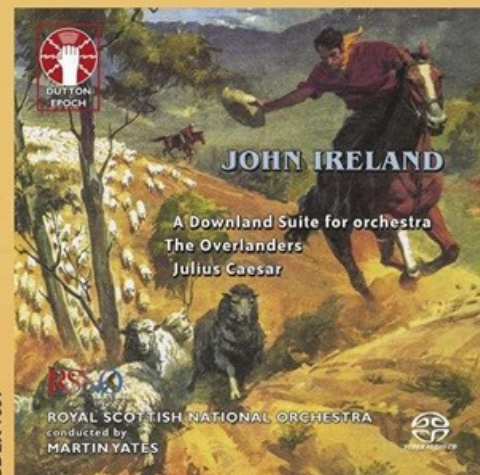
HAVERGAL BRIAN *The Vision of Cleopatra* Dutton Epoch's first recording with the orchestra and chorus of English National Opera surveys the music of Havergal Brian. The dramatic and operatic setting of *The Vision of Cleopatra* (1907), the scores and parts of which were lost in wartime bombing, has been orchestrated from the vocal score by composer John Pickard. This epic cantata is vividly brought to life by a line-up of brilliant young soloists – Claudia Boyle (soprano), Angharad Lyddon (mezzo-soprano), Claudia Huckle (contralto) and Peter Auty (tenor) – while the ENO Orchestra and Chorus are in top form under the authoritative direction of conductor Martyn Brabbins. Brian's *Two Choral Pieces* (1912), the tuneful concert overture *For Valour* (1904 rev. 1906) and the delightful *Fantastic Variations on an Old Rhyme* (1907) complete a compelling release.
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composed for London, Haydn's concerted works are all fairly early pieces, straddling the divide between Baroque and Classical approaches to concerto form. Several of the violin concertos Haydn is known to have composed are lost – a fate that nearly befell the now popular C major Cello Concerto recorded here, which only resurfaced in the 1960s. It's an energetic and enjoyable piece, with a deeply felt slow movement and an irrepressibly lively finale. Marco Ceccato gives a fine and stylish performance, though he's placed just a little too close to the microphone for comfort.

The violin concertos were probably composed for the leader of the Esterházy court orchestra, Luigi Tommasini, who judging by their virtuoso demands must have been a highly skilled player. Both are scored without wind instruments, and Amandine Beyer's accomplished performances are greatly helped by the alert playing of the orchestral strings. Indeed, the sense of sheer enjoyment in music-making is palpable throughout this disc. Sandwiching the Cello Concerto between the violin works results in two C major pieces placed back to back, and it might have been better to have the two violin concertos, in C and G major, placed first. Listeners can, of course, programme the CD's contents as they wish. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mozart • T Madsen

Mozart: Horn Concertos Nos 1-4; **T Madsen:** Invitation to a Journey with Mozart...

Christoph Ess (horn); German Hornsoud; Folkwang Chamber Orchestra Essen/Johannes Klumpp
Genuin GEN 18618 71:27 mins



Mozart's Horn Concertos were written not in a group, but at intervals throughout his life, so their presentation here in chronological sequence (the Köchel catalogue numbers are misleading in that respect) makes natural sense. Since the early horn of the period was famously tiring to play, each concerto is fairly short, with a first movement usually lasting as long as the slow second and rondo-form third combined. Even Mozart must have felt restricted sometimes by the format, as the unremarkable



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is first class

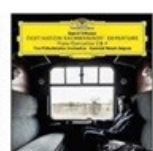
K417 concerto makes clear. Its K495 counterpart duly impresses all the more; its finale was immortally satirised by the Flanders and Swann comedy duo in the 1960s, so that the gorgeous expansive glow of the *Allegro maestoso* first movement – truly vintage Mozart – tends to be overlooked. Christoph Ess's high-octane mastery (he is principal horn of the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra), plus warmly classy period-style accompaniments from the Folkwang Chamber Orchestra, together keep any trace of monotony at arm's length during four concertos on the trot. The CD booklet tells us nothing of Ess's thoughts (which would surely be interesting) on his use of a modern valved horn rather than the valve-less instrument of Mozart's time, and mistranslates his words on the K412 concerto's unfinished Rondo; far from supplanting Mozart pupil Franz Süssmayr's version with Robert Levin's new one, he here plays both.

Trygve Madsen's *Invitation to a Journey*, written for Ess's horn quartet 'german hornsoud' and deploying the Mozart concertos' various themes for each of the four players, is inventive, engaging, and a genuine delight. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Rachmaninov • Bach

Rachmaninov: Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 4; **JS Bach:** Suite from Solo Violin Partita No. 3 (Arr. Rachmaninov)
Daniil Trifonov (piano); Philadelphia Orchestra/Yannick Nézet-Séguin
DG 4835335 70:10 mins



Why package these two concertos under the title *Destination Rachmaninov* –

Departure? You may also wonder at the relevance of the cover's photograph featuring a soulful looking Daniil Trifonov sitting alone in a railway compartment. Yet far from being mere marketing gimmicks, both title and photograph pertinently reflect the trajectory of Rachmaninov's life. In particular, they remind us that following his nervous breakdown at the end of the 19th century, Rachmaninov was forced to re-launch his career with the Second Concerto, and effectively start all over again as an exile from Russia after 1917 with the Fourth.

The train journey analogy is particularly apposite to the patchwork structure of the Fourth, composed whilst Rachmaninov hectically criss-crossed the United States giving recitals in every major city. Trifonov is wonderfully alive to its mercurial piano writing, achieving astonishing crystalline delicacy in the elaborate filigree passage work and negotiating unexpected juxtapositions of mood, from romantic warmth and nostalgia (in the haunting slow movement) to irony and percussive rhythmic intensity (in the finale), with a sure sense of purpose. Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the superbly responsive Philadelphia Orchestra follow the soloist's every interpretative nuance.

Their partnership in the Second is even more impressive. The Philadelphia strings give a

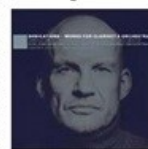
wonderfully lush delivery of the opening melody, and the slow movement dialogue between solo woodwind, horn and solo piano achieves a subtlety of phrasing and an intimacy worthy of the very finest chamber music playing. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Dedications

Bruch: Double Concerto;
Finzi: Clarinet Concerto;
Mozart: Clarinet Concerto
Roeland Hendrikx (clarinet);
London Philharmonic Orchestra/
Martyn Brabbins

Evil Penguin EPRC 0026 73:38 mins



Roeland Hendrikx offers this triumvirate of clarinet concertos in memory of his late mentor

Dame Thea King (1925-2007). 'Dedications' also alludes to the fact that most large-scale clarinet pieces came into being thanks to enterprising composers and commissioners: the Finzi concerto, which opens the collection, was written in 1948 for King's teacher and husband Frederick 'Jack' Thurston. (Hendrikx, a passionate supporter of the work, has inherited the correspondence between Thurston and Finzi, and includes extracts in the booklet notes.) Hendrikx captures its contrasting moods with clarity, and, particularly in the *Adagio*, beauty. Despite the Belgian clarinetist's concern for Finzi support in the UK, the work has enjoyed several successful recordings in recent years, such as that by Sarah Williamson (Somm), and by Michael Collins (Chandos).

Hendrikx takes Mozart's evergreen Concerto at a rather leisurely pace. This restrained approach works surprisingly well, particularly in the cadenza-like section of the *Allegro*. The London Philharmonic Orchestra sounds glorious under Martyn Brabbins, its woodwind section finds fragility beneath Mozart's cheerfulness.

Viola player Sander Geerts joins Hendrikx for the concluding – and compact – Bruch Double Concerto, a pastoral piece underpinned by nostalgia. Both soloists neatly handle the extended cantabile interplay that features throughout.

Claire Jackson

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

OPERA CHOICE



Drama and duality in Dreisig's dynamic debut

Anthony Pryer is certain there are great things to come from the talented French-Danish soprano



Leading lady:
Elsa Dreisig's
star is rising

Miroir(s)

Arias by Gounod, Rossini, Puccini, Massenet, Steibelt, R Strauss and Mozart
Elsa Dreisig (soprano); Orchestra nationale de Montpellier Occitanie/Michael Schönwandt
Erato 9029563413 70:20 mins

The young French-Danish singer Elsa Dreisig has been winning prizes since 2015 and has developed her skills singing roles in the opera houses of Berlin, Paris and Zurich. This is her debut album and it is phenomenally good.

First there is the concept of juxtaposing arias for the same dramatic character by different composers – Manon (Puccini and Massenet), Juliette (Steibelt and Gounod), Rosina (Mozart and Rossini), Salome (Massenet and Strauss) – which lifts the collection out of the hackneyed 'competition arias' category and allows dramatic explorations of character. Next, the stylistic variety enables the marvellous flexibility of the Montpellier Occitanie orchestra under Michael Schönwandt to come to the fore, ranging from the restrained poise of Mozart's 'Porgi amor', to the ominous undercurrents of Gounod's 'Dieu! Quel

frisson', and culminating in the full-on savage drama of Strauss's *Salome*.

Finally, of course, there is Dreisig's voice, youthful yet assured, agile yet fluid, and powerful throughout its entire range. In Rossini's 'Una voce poco fa' the low notes are so rich that she could be mistaken for a mezzo-soprano, and yet the aria glitters with added embellishments, and the high notes are triumphant. In the aria from Massenet's *Thaïs* her control of dynamics is impressively expressive, and in the Gounod *Faust* item she conveys the dance-like rhythms with great panache. Here and there (in Mozart's 'Porgi amor' for example) the voice tends to have a cool, technical 'gloss' rather than a deeper feeling, but we can certainly expect much more to come from this singer.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★



Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website at www.classical-music.com

Fagerlund

Höstsonaten

Anne Sofie von Otter, Erika Sunnegårdh, Helena Juntunen, Tommi Hakala, Nicholas Söderlund; Finnish National Opera Chorus & Orchestra / John Storgårds
BIS-2357 (hybrid CD/SACD)
120:08 mins (2 discs)



Höstsonaten (Autumn sonata) was commissioned by the Finnish National Opera

and premiered in Helsinki in September 2017; this double-disc set splices live recordings undertaken during that run. The libretto, written by Finnish playwright Gunilla Hemming, adapts Ingmar Bergman's film of the same name; an uncomfortable, restrained portrayal of a dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship. Composer Sebastian Fagerlund adds a surrealist gloss via an elastic timescale and clever use of 'voiceless' characters (a dead partner; the mute sibling).

The opera centres around Charlotte Andergast (mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter) and Eva (soprano Erika Sunnegårdh). Charlotte, a celebrated pianist, returns home after a seven-year tour to find Eva mourning the death of her toddler, who recently drowned, and struggling to care for Charlotte's other daughter, Helena. It's not clear from the text when the story is set, although Von Otter's character cites 'two Valium, two Mogadon' as part of her bedtime routine, so we assume late 20th century.

Von Otter is spectacular, capturing the nuance of her character's complexities and adapting her performance to suit the regular interplay with the chorus. Fagerlund's imaginative response to the narrative – a choir is used to represent the pianist's projection of an ever-present audience – allows him to draw on a wide palette of colour; this is also reflected in his use of orchestration, which skilfully blends tonal and abstract ideas.

As we follow Charlotte's struggle to find her 'famous humility', the audience is left to decide whether reconciliation with Eva will ever be possible. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★

Handel

Arminio

Christopher Lowrey, Owen Willetts, Anna Devin, Sophie Junker, Cody Quattlebaum; FestspielOrchester Göttingen/Laurence Cummings
Accent ACC26409 163 mins (3 discs)



Long neglected, *Arminio* is glorious. Bold melodies, melting duets, insane pyrotechnics, bustling overtures and sparkling solos for the band – what's not to love? Forget narrative logic and you'll be swept away, by this production especially. Countertenor Christopher Lowrey is the Germanic chieftain of the title role, betrayed by his father-in-law Segeste to the invading Romans. Surely the best *Arminio* yet recorded, Lowrey heroically slices through the busiest passages, building to cadenza finales whose virtuosity dwarfs the singing he's just pulled off. Lowrey is as expressive as he is athletic, and his characterisation carries the action through *Arminio*'s improbable release by the Roman general Varo to his reunion with his troops, victory in battle, and forgiveness of Segeste.

Handel quickened the pace by cutting 75 per cent of the libretto's original recitative. As *Arminio* dives from one passion into the next, his wife Tuscelda (Anna Devin), follows close behind. Sometimes Devin steals the show with her sincerity, vocal lustre, wistful pathos and knock-out extemporising. Both principals draw inspiration from conductor Laurence Cummings, whose brilliant manoeuvring through the score shows why he's a world-renowned Handel interpreter.

Other cast members give strong support – notably Sophie Junker, whose vivacity as Tuscelda's brother Sigismondo animates this plangent hero. Sometimes the excitement of live production pushes good judgment aside: as Segeste, the hugely charismatic bass-baritone Cody Quattlebaum can deploy too much brawn and yodel his leaps; countertenor Owen Willetts, savouring his line as the Roman tribune Tullio, forgets to keep up with Cummings's beat. On-stage thumps are audible. This is nonetheless a mesmerising performance. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Cup-winning performance:
Anne Sofie von Otter is
spectacular in Fagerlund



Handel

Xerxes (DVD)

Gaëlle Arquez, Tanja Ariane Baumgartner, Lawrence Zazzo, Louise Alder; Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester/Constantinos Carydis; dir. Tilmann Köhler (Frankfurt, 2017)
Cmajor DVD: 747908;
Blu-ray: 748004 180 mins



It's remarkable what a producer can do and still make sense of a masterpiece like *Xerxes*. In this thoughtful production from Frankfurt there's not a wig nor a silk-embroidered dress in sight, and certainly no breastplates or swords or plumed helmets. And you'll look in vain for a bridge across the Hellespont. Just a simple room and a cast in modern dress.

Tilmann Köhler stages the emotional rollercoaster of the first two acts around a huge dining table, as *Xerxes* entertains in the grand style. Step by step, or rather dish by dish, the table becomes a battle ground. The idea of the broken feast perfectly captures the disruptive nature of *Xerxes*'s tyranny, and it's also emblematic of the emotional chaos that engulfs Handel's characters as they struggle with their thwarted passions. Who could resist Arsamene clutching a cooked pheasant to his breast as he bemoans his fate, exiled by his brother *Xerxes* who has his eye on his beloved Romilda? Or Atalanta, the opera's bad girl, throwing salad around the

table as she preaches deceit? When the room is cleared for the final act, there's nowhere for the characters to hide. *Xerxes* is revealed as a very modern double hero, full of feeling when he serenades his plane tree, but arbitrary and violent in his pursuit of Romilda. And it is impossible not to be moved when the tyrant's cruelly used wife Amastre discards her male disguise to become a woman again and forgive her husband.

French mezzo Gaëlle Arquez is magnificent as *Xerxes*, and Elizabeth Sutphen makes a touching Romilda, feisty as well as tender. For once the put-upon Arsamene has an inner life of his own with the countertenor Lawrence Zazzo making a feast of his Act II aria 'Quella che tutte fe'. In the pit Constantinos Carydis never lets pace or musical imagination flag.

Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★

Puccini

Madama Butterfly (DVD)

Ermoneja Jaho, Marcelo Punte, Scott Hendricks, Elizabeth DeShong; Royal Opera Chorus & Orchestra/Antonio Pappano; dir. Moshe Leiser, Patrice Caurier (London, 2017)

Opus Arte DVD: OA1268 D;

Blu-ray: OA BD7244 D 138 mins



Traditionalists need not avert their gaze from Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's production: there's a house on the hill with sliding paper

walls, there's minimal furniture, and when the walls become doors we are treated to a spectacular view of Nagasaki harbour below. Yet everything is not quite what it seems. The tragedy is played out on a kind of Kabuki stage, and *Butterfly*'s make-up and that of other 'local' characters borrows from traditional Japanese theatre. This Cio-Cio San is married in a western bridal veil and in Act II wears a long skirt that Kate Pinkerton might have fancied. Here is a version of Puccini's opera with a very modern moral, namely the dangers of cultural appropriation.

Antonio Pappano is particularly alert to Puccini borrowing traditional Japanese melodies; at times he makes you hear this score, as well as the drama on stage, as a tug of war between East and West, one insidiously passive and the other brassy and imperial. All well and good but sometimes he chooses idiosyncratic tempos. The opening of the opera is almost comically fast, while the Act III Intermezzo is positively lugubrious, despite some ravishing playing by the woodwind.

BACKGROUND TO...

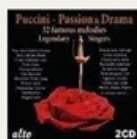
Sebastian Fagerlund (b1972)



Born in Finland, Sebastian Fagerlund is one of the country's busiest composers. After studying at both the Turku Conservatory and Helsinki's prestigious Sibelius Academy (under composer Erkki Jokinen), Fagerlund has enjoyed commissions from all over the world. With influences as wide-ranging as Eastern music and heavy metal, he composes across a variety

of genres, from orchestral works to chamber opera. He was composer in residence at the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for its 2016/17 season and this year was appointed guest composer at the Aspen Music Festival.

Reissues Reviewed by John Allison



Puccini Passion and Drama

Alto ALC 1601 (1950s-60s) 149:28 mins (2 discs)
A wonderful assortment of great singers, including **Maria Callas**, but Puccini is not best sampled like this – the equivalent of guzzling a whole tray of tiramisu, washed down with a bottle of limoncello. ★★★



Puccini Madam Butterfly

Warner 9029573591 (1966) 141:67 mins (2 discs)
One of the great recordings of *Butterfly*, this Rome version stars – the only word that will do – **Renata Scott**, magnificently supported by **John Barbirolli** at his most Italianate. ★★★★★



Sullivan HMS Pinafore

Eloquence 482 5357 (1971) 96:15 mins (2 discs)
One of the least loved of all **D'Oyly Carte** recordings, this goes, er, overboard with distracting sound effects. **Valerie Masterson** completists will probably already have it for her superb Josephine. ★★



Sullivan The Sorcerer; Utopia Limited (excerpts)

Eloquence 482 5363 (1953/63) 101:03 mins (2 discs)
If you must have recordings of these early and late Gilbert and Sullivan collaborations (the rarely performed *Utopia Limited* is represented by just five tracks), **Isidore Godfrey**'s performances capture **D'Oyly Carte** at its vintage best. ★★★

Ermonela Jaho is suitably girlish for a teenage child bride in Act I, but doesn't quite have the required vocal heft for her abandonment and suicide. Marcelo Puente sings Pinkerton carefully, but his third act remorse is about as affecting as a sheet of cardboard. It's Sharpless and Suzuki who steal the show – a consul with a tender conscience from Scott Hendricks and Elizabeth Dehong as a maid who could melt the stoniest heart. It's when she tells *Butterfly* the truth about Pinkerton that the tears begin to flow. **Christopher Cook**

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★★★★

Rossini

Aureliano in Palmira

Juan Francisco Gatell, Marina Viotti, Silvia Dalla Benetta; Camerata Bach Choir/Ania Michalak; Virtuosi Brunensis/José Miguel Pérez-Sierra
Naxos 8.660448-50 167:09 mins (3 discs)



The last of his four operas premiered in 1813 – the year he turned 21 – Rossini's *dramma serio*, *Aureliano in Palmira* did badly at its La Scala launch but then survived in the

repertoire for another 15 years or so. What probably put paid to it was the fact that Rossini borrowed music from it for both *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (1815), and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) – and as the latter became increasingly well-known its re-use of items such as the overture and the original opening chorus would have bothered audiences. In any case the score is uneven, Rossini putting some of its finest numbers on the transfer list.

Nor is Romani's libretto one of his best. Set in the year 273 AD, the plot shows the Roman Emperor Aureliano defeating the city of Palmyra in battle, but unable to quell either its queen Zenobia or her (fictional) lover Arsace, whose loyalty to one another eventually causes the Emperor to show mercy towards them both; despite the high-flown rhetoric, the result feels a little cold. There is undoubtedly good music on the way, though this live recording from the 2017 Rossini in Wildbad Festival is in limited sound, and neither the choral singing nor the orchestral playing are special: at times conductor José Miguel Pérez-Sierra struggles to keep his forces precisely together. Uneven singing,

too, from the cast. At the top end is vital tenor Juan Francisco Gatell as Aureliano, with the fluent Silvia Dalla Benetta (Zenobia) and Marina Viotti (Arsace), both accomplished.

George Hall

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Salieri

Les Horaces

Judith van Wanroij, Cyrille Dubois, Julien Dran, Jean-Sébastien Bou; Les Chantres du Centre de musique baroque de Versailles; Les Talens Lyriques/Christophe Rousset
Aparté AP 185 85:43 mins (2 discs)



Though widely characterised as Mozart's inferior, Antonio Salieri had the gifts and courage to radically re-think French tragic opera. *Les Horaces* is the second such work of Salieri's Christophe Rousset has brought to the concert stage, and his conducting balances the score's rawness against the seamlessness – solos into ensembles, sinfonias into frantic choruses – with which Salieri defied French conventions.

The instrumental and choral numbers could be from 50 years later: an epic overture explodes the boundaries of the form; stirring fanfares and choruses call for revolution; strings and woodwinds cut and thrust like the protagonists on stage. Rousset's fierce energy and musical intelligence unleashes the fire, colours and grandeur of Salieri's drama. But the dearth of lyricism in this opera stymies solo singers and the creation of character. In the action, the heroine Camille must look on helplessly as her brother and her betrothed, citizens of opposing city-states, are chosen for a mortal fight that will decide who should govern. The gods decree it, the father/ruler insists on it, and Camille's brother ends up slaying her lover. Judith van Wanroij shines as Camille, urgent in her recitative and searing in her calls to resistance. But pat phrases and busy exchanges box her in vocally. This is true for the other soloists as well. What Salieri dramatised was not individual agency but a collective, and his musical means for doing so can pall after the first hour of this ninety-minute work. **Berta Joncus**

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Wagner

The Ring of the Nibelung (DVD)

Salzburg Marionette Theatre
Belvedere BVE 10138 109 mins



Notwithstanding the centuries of tradition behind puppet opera, staging the *Ring* is a tall order. This condensing of the work's 16 hours

into two, shows that even puppet opera is not immune to the ravages of *Regio* opera. A highly interpretative commentary is delivered with energy and imagination by a male and a female actor; but underlying the whole production is an overtly didactic approach in which, amongst much else, the gods arrive at Valhalla in a Cadillac and the Ride of the Valkyries is staged as a disco dance.

Occasionally the combination of actors and puppets works well, particularly when the former arrive on stage as the giants Fasolt and Fafner looking all too convincing against the size of the puppet gods, but far too often the fatal disjunction between the sheer scale of Wagner's score and the miniature staging jars. There is also a modernistic gloss that seems to indicate a production that is fundamentally uneasy with the work itself. There is some pertinent updating, but so often the observations are banal: Alberich's pursuit of the Rhine Maidens becomes for the woman narrator 'sexual harassment' and for the man 'mobbing'. Elsewhere the modernising is simply irritating: Siegmund arrives dressed as a cowboy on a motorbike and there is a deal of concerned 'tut-tutting' over the chauvinistic politics of *Götterdämmerung*. While the reduction to an evening's entertainment understandably requires concision, far too often the narrative intervention is spoken over the music, turning Wagner's score into melodrama. Perhaps most telling is that, in the end, the biggest thrills come from the music distilled from Georg Solti's pioneering Decca recording, replete with some of the finest Wagnerian voices of the day. Too sophisticated for children and rather laboured for adults, whoever its intended audience there is precious little magic in this over-earnest realisation. **Jan Smaczny**

PERFORMANCE ★★
PICTURE & SOUND ★★

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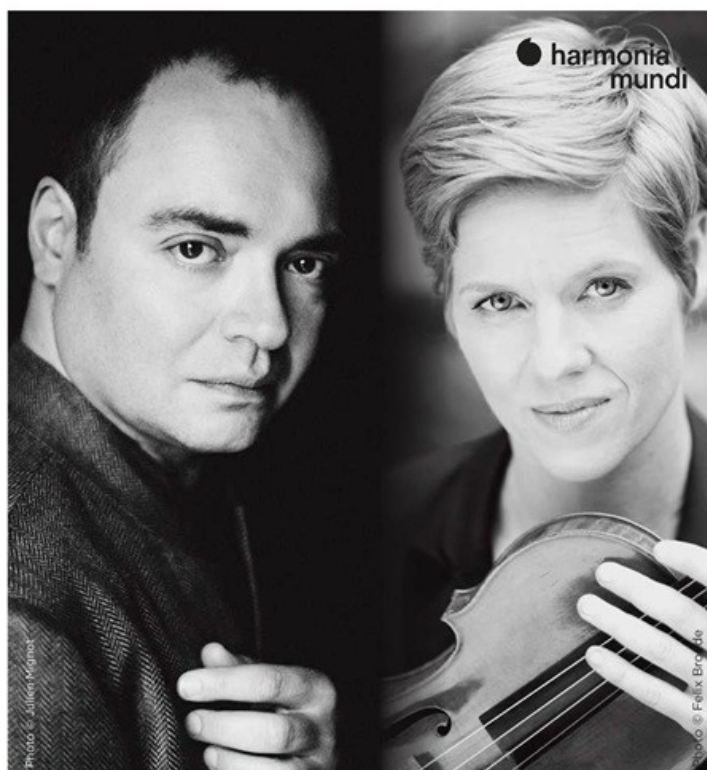
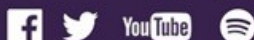
(Review of the 2017 premiere concerts)

The latest release from Apollo's Fire and Jeannette Sorrell celebrates ancient Celtic folk carols brought to America by Irish immigrants and transformed into soulful Appalachian carols. This glowing and joyful album features Medieval harp, vielle, wooden flutes and lutes along with children's voices and the acclaimed Apollo's Singers. The people of the mountains welcome Christmas with LOVE, SINGING, DANCING, and PRAYER.

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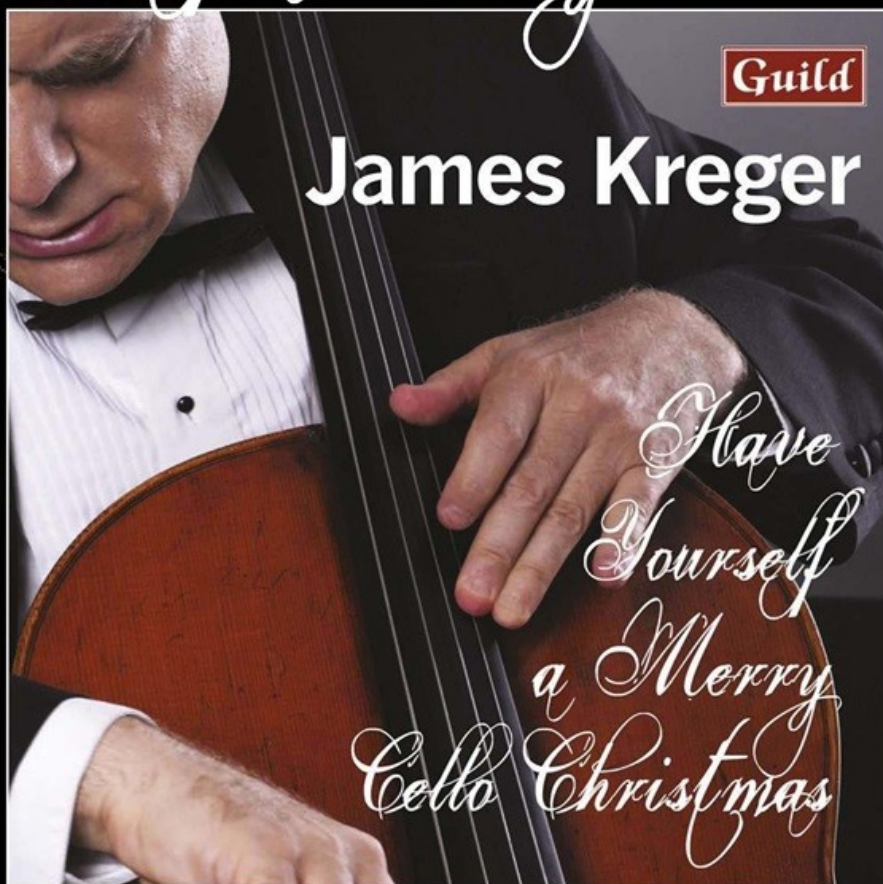


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James Kreger

Have Yourself a Merry Cello Christmas



Internationally acclaimed cellist, James Kreger, has created a Christmas album with a difference. In his own words: *"The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the thrill of engaging the most profound and challenging cello masterpieces does not inhibit my deep affection for these Christmas melodies or my desire to 'sing' them, as so many people around the world love to do. My aim is to present them from my own perspective, in fashions that maximize their beauty and bring out their unexpected qualities."*

The result is an album of Christmas music skilfully arranged with the cello taking the vocal line.

Includes: Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas ~ O Holy Night! ~ Away in a Manger ~ We Three Kings/What Child Is This? ~ Go Tell It on the Mountain ~ It Came Upon a Midnight Clear ~ I Don't Know How to Love Him ~ First Noel ~ Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire ~ God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen ~ Angels We Have Heard on High ~ Little Drummer Boy ~ Silent Night

James Kreger, cello, with: Bill Mays and Alex Rybeck, piano; Andrew Sterman, woodwinds; Sean Harkness, guitars; Melanie Feld, oboe & English horn; William Galison, harmonica; Lynette Wardle, harp; Patrick Milando, French Horn; Bill Hayes, percussion; Ned Paul Ginsburg, synthesizers & arrangements.

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CHORAL & SONG CHOICE



A 'gentle master' emerges from Josquin's shadow

Kate Bolton-Porciatti basks in the warm glow of The Brabant Ensemble's Févin Masses and motets



Masses of talent: Stephen Rice and The Brabant Ensemble

Antoine de Févin

Missa Ave Maria, Missa Salve sancta parens

The Brabant Ensemble/Stephen Rice

Hyperion CDA68265 79:13 mins

Priest, singer and composer to 'good king Louis' XII of France, Antoine de Févin was highly esteemed in his day, as attest the various plaudits to 'le gentil Févin' and the wide circulation of his works in the early 1500s.

Since the theorist Glareanus dubbed him 'a happy imitator of Josquin', Févin has hovered in the shadow of his more illustrious contemporary. This disc, then, is an important contribution to our understanding of the 'gentle master musician', bringing to light two of his Masses and a pair of motets. The *Missa Ave Maria* quotes and ingeniously re-works Josquin's terse 'Hail, Mary' motet into a sumptuously textured tapestry – worthy of a man born in the magnificent town of Arras. Polyphonic lines, dovetailing voices, and strict canons contrast with chordal passages, duets and trios. In the plainchant Mass *Salve sancta parens*, Févin laces florid melismas around the chant foundations, and symbolically entwines 'imperfect' duple time (*tempus imperfectum* – alluding to mortal

life), and 'perfect' triple time (*tempus perfectum* – alluding to Paradise). Similarly, in the joyous motet 'Ascendens Christus in altum', he offsets vocal trios with homophonic textures to suggest the Trinity. We're also treated to two versions of the airy motet *Sancta Trinitas*, one pumped up with additional parts by Févin's contemporary, Arnold von Bruck.

Director Stephen Rice brings perceptive musical insights

This disc continues The Brabant Ensemble's laudable exploration of the byways of Franco-Flemish polyphony. Director Stephen Rice brings perceptive musical insights to these accounts, and also sheds light on Févin's idiom in the excellent CD booklet. His vocal ensemble may be slender but the singing is robust and buoyantly articulated. Boyish upper voices offset velvety tenors and basses, and the relatively close recording perspective produces a sound at once lucid and lustrous.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

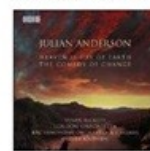


Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website at www.classical-music.com

Julian Anderson

Heaven is Shy of Earth; The Comedy of Change

Susan Bickley (mezzo-soprano); London Sinfonietta; BBC Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/Oliver Knussen
Online ODE 1313-2 62:21 mins



Heaven is Shy of Earth is a substantial work of intriguing paradoxes. Its opening

flugelhorn melody evokes Copland's spacious landscapes, yet the deliciously stretched orchestral tunings place this music in the 21st century. It sets the words of the Mass, yet its point of departure, poems by Emily Dickinson, makes this more a celebration of natural creation. Gloriously uplifting and luminescent, it has dark threads and exudes both a striking simplicity and a numinous complexity. In this searingly beautiful performance, Susan Bickley soars magnificently, while the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra are on top form, from the fizzing and chattering textures of 'Gloria (with Bird)' to the chorus's sublimely sustained final chord.

Written for the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, *The Comedy of Change*, which opens the disc, provides a marked contrast. Skittishly spartan, yet detailed, abstract textures of this ballet are full of life in this evocative performance from the London Sinfonietta. Anderson's long-time friend Oliver Knussen, who died in July, conducts both works, and these live performances stand as a testament to his fine ear, finely judged pacing and selfless advocacy. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Dove

A Brief History of Creation; Gaia Theory

Hallé Children's Choir; Hallé/Mark Elder; BBC Symphony Orchestra/Josep Pons
NMCNMC233 69:31 mins



A Brief History of Creation, at over 47 minutes, is the longest of these two works. A splashy, technicolor portrayal of 'the birth of the Earth', written for the Hallé

Children's Choir and Orchestra, its Hollywood-style soundworld may delight young performers who enjoy John Williams-scored blockbusters: Jonathan Dove similarly takes ideas from some of the 20th century's most colourful scores – principally works by Prokofiev, Holst and John Adams. Alas, it shows little of his own characteristic inventiveness, while the kind of surprises he springs in his masterful short choral pieces appear only in muted form here: instances include the striking change of tonal colour when the creatures crawl out of the sea and take their first breaths of air; or the choir's hemiola rhythms over the orchestra's springing arpeggios in 'Whales Return to the Sea' (portraying horses and their ancestors at this point); or the ambling swing of 'Elephants'. The choir sings the undemanding unison lines with zest, but the lack of melodic invention, such as Britten or Bennett excelled in for their children's music, leaves in plain sight Dove's blatant borrowings, such as the jogging bass and jabbing horns from Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* in the longest and least involving movement, 'Dinosaurs'.

Gaia Theory for orchestra alone presents a pleasant churn of mannerisms from John Adams and Steve Reich, but again this pleasant but unmemorable work scarcely demonstrates the qualities which have lately earned Dove so much admiration from both musicians and audiences. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Dowland

First Booke of Songes or Ayres
Grace Davidson (soprano),
David Miller (lute)

Signum Records SIGCD553 73:21 mins



John Dowland's *First Booke of Songes or Ayres*, published in 1597, inspired many imitations

but no equals. They find elegant interpreters here in Grace Davidson, her soprano true and treble-like, and the lutenist David Miller, his playing (on two instruments, in F and G) supple and propulsive. The atmosphere is intimate and confiding; the music presented simply with minimal ornament. Occasionally the long lines of the slower songs can bring a certain smoothing-out of the text, but in



Abandonata apart:
Carolyn Sampson
is in glorious voice

faster ones, many setting what were originally dance tunes, Davidson puts the words across gently but with gratifying naturalness.

She introduces a touch of amorous freshness for 'Awake, sweet love', three songs from the end, a tone that in the ensuing 'Come, heavy sleep' takes on a sensuous aspect. Generally, though, the colouring of words is subtle – perhaps to a fault. For example, the last verse of 'Sleep, wayward thoughts' has a contrast of opposite imagery within each line, but Davidson and Miller take their cue from the beginning of each line only. The songs thus merge into one mesmeric, rarely punctuated sequence, in which Dowland's images of melancholy are rendered in broad watercolour strokes; but they are nonetheless beautifully dispatched. *Erica Jeal*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Enescu

Strigoi; Pastorale fantaisie
Rodica Vica (soprano), Tiberius Simu (tenor), Bogdan Baci (baritone), Alin Anca (narrator);
Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra/
Gabriel Bebeșelea
Capriccio C5346 53:15 mins



A remarkable number of previously unknown works by George Enescu have resurfaced

in recent years. The latest is the oratorio *Strigoi* (Ghosts) setting

a text by Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu and composed in the middle of World War I. Enescu appears to have completed a vocal piano arrangement of the work in a remarkably quick period of time. Yet owing to the chaotic political situation, the manuscript was apparently mislaid, and the composer never got around to revising or orchestrating *Strigoi*.

Thanks to Romanian musicians Cornel Țăranu and Sabin Pautza who have reconstructed *Strigoi* and clothed it in suitably idiomatic instrumentation, as well as to the fine vocal and orchestral contributions on this recording, we can now appreciate a fascinating score whose most striking feature is the extensive declamatory speaking role for the narrator. Stylistically, Enescu's writing seems closely related to Debussy, Bartók and even Schoenberg, frequently inhabiting a half-way house between the hyper-romanticism of his Third Symphony and the more austere archaic idiom of his operatic masterpiece, *Oedipe*.

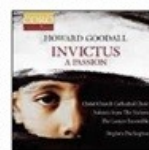
Another intriguing discovery is the early unpublished *Pastorale fantaisie* for small orchestra, first heard in Paris in 1899. Given the relatively positive response to its first performance, it is unclear why the composer should have overlooked such an attractive and imaginative work, and it is played here with great warmth and sensitivity. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

H Goodall

Invictus: A Passion

Soloists from The Sixteen; Christ Church Cathedral Choir; The Lanyer Ensemble/Stephen Darlington
Coro Connections COR16165 58:02 mins



In the New Testament, Gethsemane is a place of existential doubt and

agonised soul-searching. In Howard Goodall's modern Passion narrative it is evoked in music of cheerful buoyancy, with chirpy pizzicatos and a twinkling piano *obbligato*, the words sung to a tune almost comical in its heedless levity. 'Lamentation', the second movement, strikes a more serious tone in its setting of a 19th-century poem about a slave auction.

There is fine solo work from tenor Mark Dobell in 'Invictus', setting a poem by William Ernest Henley. From placid beginnings Goodall builds Henley's paean to Victorian stoicism toward a peroration which aims to be stirring, yet feels facile in its stage-managing of the emotions. Kirsty Hopkins brings her fresh soprano to 'The Song of Mary Magdalene', where Goodall counterpoints lines by Christina Rossetti with Latin verses from John's gospel and Isaac Watts's hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross'. WB Yeats, Aemilia Lanyer, William Wilberforce, and George Herbert all find their way into the text of the concluding 'I will arise', with more Henley. With such verbal clutter, the coherence of the movement suffers. The choral singing is committed if occasionally scrappy, and the small chamber band accompanies neatly. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Handel

Armida abbandonata, HWV 105; Tra le fiamme, HWV 170; Figlio d'alte speranze, HWV 113; etc
Carolyn Sampson (soprano); The King's Consort/Robert King
Vivat VIVAT 117 75:08 mins



What truly distinguishes soprano Carolyn Sampson's recordings are her programmes.

Yes, her instrument is glorious and her readings exquisitely crafted,

but it's her carefully selected and interconnected musical choices that truly set her apart. This new recording exemplifies Sampson's rare sensibility, as both performer and intellectual.

The young Handel, darling of Italy's high-power patrons, poured into his cantatas of the first decade of the 18th century expressive means which he was encountering for the first time. Abandonment sharpened the drama: Armida whose lover has escaped, Daedalus whose son Icarus flies too close to the sun, Agrippina whose own son Nero has ordered her execution – each suffers diverse passions due to abandonment. But unlike other cantata composers, Handel communicates the individual nature of his subjects. The sexiness of Armida, the silliness of Icarus, the shiftlessness of Agrippina are implicit in his score; Sampson's performance, and that of the King's Consort, makes them splendidly explicit.

As the sensuous Armida, Sampson almost draws the word 'cruelle' as continuo players weave obsessively around it. In 'Tra le fiamme', about Icarus and Daedalus, first Sampson and then the Consort top Handel's flighty variations with their own; it would be funny, except that in the next aria Sampson's darkened vocal hues and the Consort's jabbing sequences prefigure the fall of Icarus. As the murderous, desperate Agrippina, Sampson's intensity is relentless, from the machine-like staccato of her furious recitative to the limpid line and luminous timbres of arias in which she surrenders to her fate. Her extemporising isn't quite as extravagant as that of other artists performing the same cantatas, but in *Abandonata* Sampson plumbs fresh expressive depths. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Handel

Ode for St Cecilia's Day

Carolyn Sampson (soprano), Ian Bostridge (tenor); Polish Radio Choir; Dunedin Consort/John Butt
Linn CKD578 61:15 mins



To mark the 15th anniversary of Kraków's Mysteria Paschalia festival, its artistic director John Butt led

and recorded Handel's *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*. Butt brought star

soloists and the Dunedin Consort with him, creating an incandescent performance – by his artists. The Polish Radio Choir couldn't quite keep up.

Despite missed moments, you should catch Carolyn Sampson, Ian Bostridge and the Dunedin in this Handel masterpiece. They glide through the score in utterly ravishing ways that transcend rival recordings, as when cellist Jonathan Manson takes flight in 'What passion cannot music raise and quell!'; Sampson's soaring silver tones in response have a numinous quality absent from her earlier recording of this music for Hyperion. Butt's tempos are daringly slow and his silences perfectly timed, bringing out the terse beauty of Handel's vocal and instrumental lines. Bostridge bonds music to word-meaning so persuasively that they become a single heartfelt utterance, as in 'The Trumpet's Loud Clamour'.

The Polish Radio Choir is bold and precise, but remote. 'The Trumpet's Loud Clamour' is about yielding to war's madness; this the band does, with a boisterousness that borders on pure noise, while the choir just gets louder. Consider also the Ode's finale: after a towering call-and-response between soprano and trumpet, the choir's stately homophony feels anticlimactic. It's not wrong, but given what the soloists just did it's not right either. Yet the strengths of this recording vastly outweigh its weaknesses. It concludes with a crisp rendition of Handel's Concerto Grosso in A minor. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

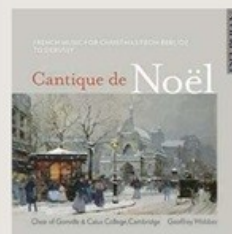
100 Years of Nine Lessons & Carols

Works by Adam, Adès, Berlioz, JH Hopkins, Ledger, Pärt, Rüttli, Tavener, Weir, D Willcocks, et al
Choir of King's College, Cambridge/Stephen Cleobury, David Willcocks, Philip Ledger; Henry Websdale, Donal McCann (organ)
King's College KGS 0033
106:42 mins (2 discs)



Although it had only been broadcast annually for just over a decade, such was the impact of the King's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols that during

CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH DELPHIAN



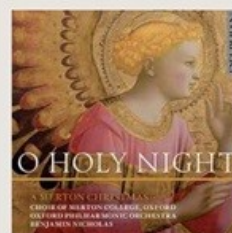
DCD34197

Cantique de Noël: French music for Christmas
from Berlioz to Debussy
Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge/
Geoffrey Webber

Geoffrey Webber and his choir have developed a reputation for exploring the unusual, and this album is no exception. A number of traditional French melodies have been adapted over the years to become familiar Christmas fare in English-speaking lands; here they are heard in their original French arrangements. The resulting Romantic fervour is an aspect of Christmas that is sometimes lost amid the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Christmas trees and domestic bliss, and it gives fresh context and meaning to beloved music from Berlioz and his successors.

'Fervent, engaging, heart-on-sleeve interpretations ... Vraiment superbe!'

— Choir & Organ, October 2018



DCD34192

O Holy Night: A Merton Christmas
Choir of Merton College, Oxford & Oxford
Philharmonic Orchestra / Benjamin Nicholas

Two of John Rutter's most exquisite works are complemented by orchestral versions of well-loved traditional fare. From the ecstatic brass fanfares that introduce *O come, all ye faithful* and *Hark! the herald-angels sing* to the intimate performances of Elizabeth Poston's *Jesus Christ the apple tree* and Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, Christmas is celebrated with a fresh sense of all its magic and glory.

'a lavish millefeuille of seasonal sweetness'

— Choir & Organ, October 2018

DELPHIAN 2017 BESTSELLER
6 weeks in Specialist Classical Chart



DCD34145

Christmas with the Shepherds:
The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

A Christmas programme with a difference: Rory McCleery and his acclaimed consort echo the shepherds' noels through a motet by Jean Mouton which, astonishingly, remained in the repertoire of the Sistine Chapel for over a hundred years after its composition around 1515. So famous already by the middle of the century, when Cristóbal de Morales was engaged as a singer in the papal chapel, it was inevitable that Mouton's motet should form the basis – in accordance with the compositional practice of the time – for a mass by Morales; and, later still, for a new motet to the same text by Annibale Stabile. A world premiere recording of the latter work crowns this unique programme, drawn from new performing editions by McCleery himself.

'unobtrusively wonderful – sung in some style and sumptuously recorded in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford ... [An] immaculately produced disc'
— The Arts Desk, December 2014

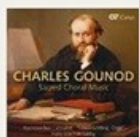
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Reissues Reviewed by George Hall



Gounod Sacred Choral Music

Carus 83.490 (2005) 65:10 mins

Much of it written for amateur forces, Gounod's church music is uneven in quality, though these expertly controlled, well-recorded accounts by the **Vocalisti Chamber Choir** give a good idea of its potential. ★★★



Lalande Grands Motets

Harmonia Mundi HAF 8901351 (1998) 64:19 mins

Court composer to both Louis XIV and Louis XV, Lalande is represented by three examples of a form in which he excelled, delivered by **William Christie** and his regular forces with delicacy and brilliance. ★★★★★



Rossini Petite Messe solennelle

Harmonia Mundi HMG 501724 (2001) 80:24 mins

There's a sense of discipline and neatness to **Marcus Creed**'s account of Rossini's ambiguous Mass setting which brings out the frequent musical delights of the score; carefully sung and touchingly played. ★★★★★



Heinrich Schütz Sacred Choral Music 1648

Rondeau Production ROP702122 (1992)

154:40 mins (2 discs)

Schütz's substantial published collection receives a pioneering historically-informed recording, made with love as well as imagination and in an appropriate acoustic by the boys choir's founder/conductor **Heinz Hennig**. ★★★★★

the Second World War some of the prisoners interned in a Japanese POW camp enacted their own recreation with a choir robed in sheets for surplices and introduced by a pretend BBC announcer. 2018 marks the centenary of the Cambridge institution and the anniversary is celebrated with this set of historic and new recordings. It's a shame there's nothing earlier than 1958 to lend a longer perspective, but it's fascinating to trace the evolution of the choir's sound over 60 years and three music directors. (Longevity of tenure seems almost to come with the territory. The first broadcast in 1928 was directed by someone who'd been in post as chapel organist since 1876!).

Curiously ponderous tempos seemed to have held sway in the early Willcocks years, and 1963's *Adam lay ybounden* finds concluding consonants springing to attention like over-enthusiastic squaddies. By the 1980 *In dulci jubilo*, however, Philip Ledger encourages something less uptight, even if his descendant for 'Hark the Herald' underwhelms. But Stephen Cleobury bags the lion's share of the tracks, and particularly

striking are some of the commissions that have been a feature of his directorship. Arvo Pärt's skipping, blink-and-you-miss-it *Bogoroditse Djevo* and Carl Rütti's bluesy *I wonder as I wander* might be more pews-friendly than Thomas Adès's ambitious *Fayrfax Carol* or Judith Weir's haunted *Illuminate, Jerusalem*, but as custodians of a national treasure, the choir takes versatility and tradition in its consummate, unflappable stride.

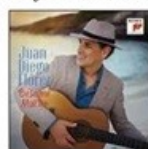
Paul Riley

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Bésame Mucho

Songs by Carlos Brito, Andrés Soto, Juan Madera Castro, Simón Díaz, et al

Juan Diego Flórez (tenor), Jonathan Bolívar, Hugo Fernando Gonzáles, Carlos Ayala, Jairo Morales (guitar) Sony 19075822942 69:19 mins



Superstar tenor Juan Diego Flórez has long been lighting up the international opera scene with his soaring voice and dazzling stage presence. This glorious album

illuminates a very different side to the Peruvian tenor, with the singer returning to the music of his childhood in this appealing collection of Latin American songs. Flórez describes this personal rediscovery as first prompted by having children of his own, and he now regularly performs these songs as encores in recital: 'they hit the audience like magic arrows', he writes.

The album ranges freely across South and Central America, with songs from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico and, of course, Flórez's native Peru. Flórez responds to this variety with sensitivity, bringing a rich array of vocal styles to the album, from the relaxed swing of Peruvian favourite *El Tamalito* to the heart-on-sleeve lament of the Mexican classic *La Malagueña*. Far from a gimmick, the album has a strong sense of integrity as evidenced by the careful choice of accompanying groups, which range from full Venezuelan *loropo* ensemble to Brazilian samba band, while the disc features four separate solo guitarists, each specialising in a different genre. This is an album packed with delights, produced and performed with great care, sensitivity and heart. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

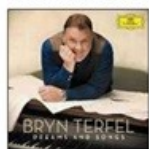
RECORDING ★★★★★

Dreams & Songs

Songs by Bock, Denver, Chaplin, Ervin Drake, Flanders & Swann, Karl Jenkins, Augustin Lara, Malotte, Wildhorn et al

Bryn Terfel (bass-baritone); with Danielle de Niese (soprano), Katherine Jenkins (mezzo-soprano), Joseph Calleja (tenor); Metro Voices; Czech Philharmonic Orchestra/ Paul Bateman

DG 4835514 47:42 mins



Encores are often selected for their flashy virtuosity, bringing concerts to a close with a crowd-pleasing firework. This collection of encores from the celebrated Bryn Terfel is certainly not short on showmanship, but is at its strongest where the encore is presented less as grand finale and more as a moment of intimacy.

The album is something of a mixed bag, featuring a wide range of repertoire from Celtic folksong to musical theatre hit. Terfel's heartfelt

performance of Welsh classic 'Ar Lan y Môr' is a joy, and his rendition of 'If I Were a Rich Man' is crisply comic and packed with character. The album has a glitzy BBC Radio 2 'Friday Night is Music Night' feel, but all the same, some of the orchestral accompaniments do still feel rather too syrupy, particularly Karl Jenkins's 'The Shepherd Poet of Passchendaele' (notwithstanding David Childs's beautiful euphonium solo).

Various starry duets also feature: in a bells-and-whistles arrangement of *Amazing Grace*, Terfel is rather out-sung by the wonderful Danielle de Niese, while Terfel and Rob Brydon give a suitably amusing performance of 'The Golf Song'. Terfel brings great warmth and bravura to the album, and even if these rather overblown arrangements may not be to all tastes, the disc nonetheless offers an enjoyable escape. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Vienna: Fin de Siècle

Berg: Sieben frühe Lieder;

A Mahler: Die stille Stadt, etc.

Schoenberg: Lieder Op. 2;

Webern: Fünf Lieder (nach Richard

Dehmel); **Wolf:** Mignon I-IV;

Zemlinsky: Lieder - Op. 5 Nos

1 & 6; Op. 7, Nos 1, 2 & 4, etc.

Barbara Hannigan (soprano),

Reinbert de Leeuw (piano)

Alpha Classics ALPHA 393 77:41 mins



This fine recording draws together six closely-linked figures from *fin-de-siècle*

Vienna: Schoenberg, his pupils Berg and Webern, his teacher Zemlinsky, Alma Mahler, and one of their spiritual fathers, Hugo Wolf. Hannigan's luminous voice perfectly suits this music. She conveys the uneasy, almost unbinged feel of the *fin de siècle* not only in her lyric singing, but also in her crooning, swooping, sliding, whispering and weeping. Reinbert de Leeuw matches her with his delicate touch, and his sense of layering in the carefully terraced accompaniments.

That said, the recital presents numerous slow, dreamy songs which share the same harmonic and textural language. It's best heard in bits. I would have loved a programme which showed the

Choral & Song Reviews

complexity, contrast and range of song-writing at the turn of the 20th century. And while Hannigan's and de Leeuw's liner note is written with enthusiasm, it could offer more useful insights into these complex musicians and the tumultuous years which shaped their music.

The first three groups (Berg, Schoenberg, Webern) and the Alma Mahler songs are almost overwhelmingly intimate in feel. Hannigan's consonants are not that prominent, so you have to get up close to hear the actual poetry. But much of this music has been well-served in recordings, as have the closing four Mignon settings by Wolf. For me, the seven Zemlinsky songs were a revelation. 'Da waren zwei Kinder' and the tumultuous 'Entbietung' also elicit a new, weightier sound from Hannigan. 'Frühlingstag' is exquisitely, unforgettably beautiful.

Natasha Loges

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★



BACKGROUND TO...

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Wolf's life was very much one of darkness and light, and both inspired his music. Expelled from the Vienna Conservatory, Wolf was encouraged by Brahms and Wagner, whom he had met; Mahler was also a friend in his youth. Illness led to depression – something that would haunt him his entire life. His settings of poetry by the likes of Goethe, Eichendorff and Ibsen revealed him to be a master of vocal melody. He didn't think much of the majority of his work, though, and most of it was published posthumously. Wolf ended his days in a Vienna asylum.

A Walk with Ivor Gurney

J Bingham: A Walk with Ivor Gurney; **Gurney:** Since I Believe in God the Father Almighty; Three Songs **Howells:** Like as the Hart; **Vaughan Williams:** Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis; An Oxford Elegy, etc. Dame Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano), Simon Callow (narrator); Tenebrae; Aurora Orchestra/ Nigel Short

Signum SIGCD 557 87:23 mins (2 discs)



In A Walk With Ivor Gurney, Judith Bingham has imagined the composer/poet walking in his

native Gloucestershire and finding common cause with the Roman soldiers buried there. Excerpts from Gurney's poems and Latin inscriptions on tombs discovered in the county are set to luminous harmonies for chorus, beautifully sung by Nigel Short's Tenebrae, and expressive melodies for solo mezzo-soprano, clearly relished by Sarah Connolly. Connolly also shows her characteristic care for words and line in three songs by Gurney, two orchestrated by his friend Herbert Howells and one, the lovely 'Sleep', by Gerald Finzi. Tenebrae bring their perfect chording and balance to bear on a rare Gurney anthem, the questioning 'Since I believe in God the Father Almighty'.

And that, maybe with a bit more Gurney, would have made a first-rate single disc. But Signum have spread the programme on to two discs (for the price of one), adding pieces by Howells and Vaughan Williams, both also Gloucestershire-born: the threads linking the programme together are disentangled in Philip Lancaster's helpful note. Vaughan Williams is represented by the *Tallis Fantasia*, eloquently played by the Aurora Orchestra strings but uncomfortably restless in tempo, two gems of anthems, and the *Oxford Elegy* on texts by Matthew Arnold, spoken and sung. Tenebrae and Aurora cherish their curving lines in the composer's purest pastoral vein, and Simon Callow is a clear and sympathetic narrator. He is perhaps not quite perfectly dovetailed into the flow of the work, but well integrated into the atmospheric recording. *Anthony Burton*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

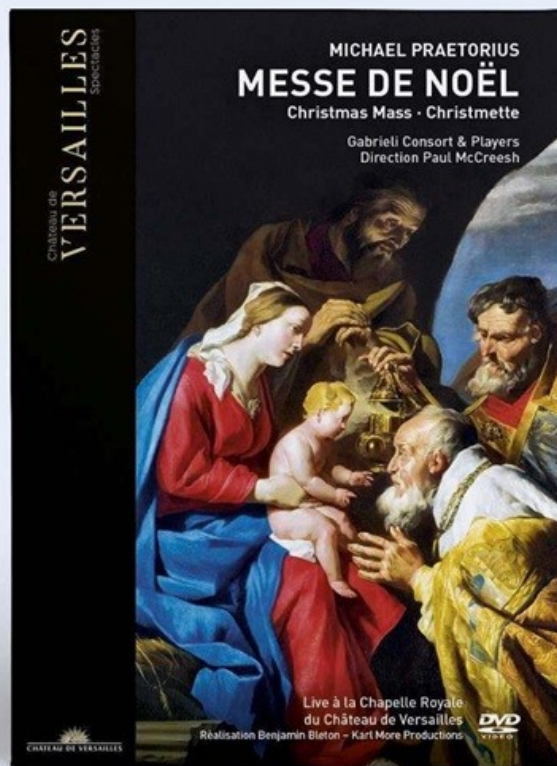
RECORDING

★★★★

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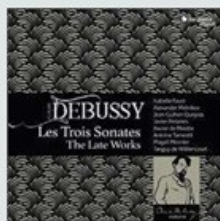
Recorded live in the Royal Chapel of Versailles



Distributed in the UK by RSK Entertainment
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CHAMBER CHOICE



Debussy: The Late Works

Violin Sonata; Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp; Cello Sonata; Berceuse héroïque; Pièce pour l'oeuvre du 'Vêtement du blessé'; Élégie; Les Soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon

Magali Mosnier (flute), Isabelle Faust (violin), Antoine Tamestit (viola), Jean-Guihen Queyras (cello),

Xavier de Maistre (harp), Alexander Melnikov, Tanguy de Williencourt, Javier Perianes (piano)

Harmonia Mundi HMM 902303

54:02 mins

Debussy's three late chamber sonatas are among the most exquisite of all his creative progeny, offering a tantalising fusion of the infinite and finite, of pseudo-improvisatory gestures operating within a malleable structural framework. Incredibly it took nearly a century for performing styles to catch up

Faust and Melnikov deftly trace the Violin Sonata's contours

with Debussy's visionary writing. Until recently this music was almost invariably viewed and experienced through a prism of 19th-century rhetoric – listening to Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov deftly tracing the evanescent contours of the Violin Sonata comes therefore as something of a revelation.

So, too, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Javier Perianes in the Cello Sonata, the first of the three to be

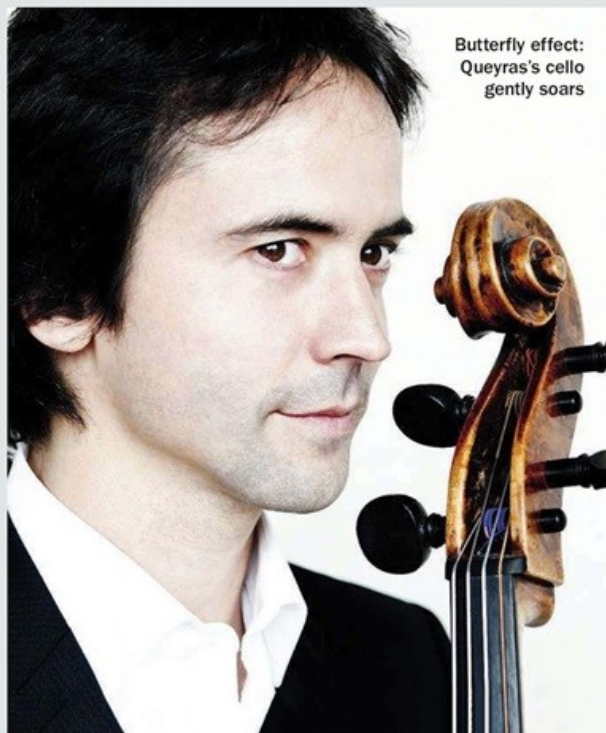
composed, whose piquant patterning (especially in the central 'Sérénade') seemingly trace the elusive trajectory

of a butterfly in a summer breeze. Most striking of all is the enchanting triple sonata, whose harp-inflected musings appear to float free of musical gravity in this hypnotic account from Xavier de Maistre, Antoine Tamestit and Magali Mosnier. Four piano rarities played with beguiling sensitivity by Tanguy de Williencourt round out one of the most captivating releases of the Debussy centenary year.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

A captivating end to a centenary year

Julian Haylock swoons over elegant performances of Debussy's late sonatas



Butterfly effect:
Queyras's cello
gently soars

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the [BBC Music Magazine website](http://www.bbc-music-magazine.com) at www.classical-music.com

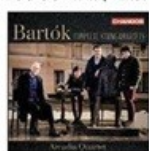
Bartók

String Quartets Nos 1-6

Arcadia Quartet

Chandos CHAN 10992(2)

160:06 mins (2 discs)



More attached to the string quartet than any other genre, Bartók left a testimony that remains

both spiritually and technically challenging. Daunting and profoundly satisfying for listeners and players alike, his six quartets were composed at regular intervals across his creative life and comprise a cycle that stands second only to Beethoven's and surely qualifies as the greatest

20th-century contribution to the quartet literature. No ensemble would want to miss out on tackling it, but especially not the fast-rising Arcadia Quartet with its roots in Transylvania.

Born in the westernmost part of present-day Romania, this great Hungarian composer breathes the spirit of multi-ethnic Transylvania. The muted buzz we hear in the first scherzo of the Fourth Quartet suggests a flight of the fireflies as the composer evokes the nocturnal insect world of the Hungarian plains. Bartók often quoted folk music and sometimes made his own; in the searingly melismatic Second Quartet he reveals his then recent discovery of North African music.

Whatever the inspirations, these players are alive to them, just as they are alert to the technical demands lurking around every corner.

These Arcadians also find haunting desolation. The First Quartet, reflecting the same unhappy love affair enshrined in the First Violin Concerto, takes on Beethovenian intensity here. The Sixth Quartet dates from 1939, a time not only of war but of Bartók's mother's death and his own impending exile, and the *Mesto* that so sadly introduces each movement takes over completely in a beautifully balanced performance.

John Allison

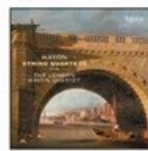
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Haydn

String Quartets, Op. 64 Nos 1-6

London Haydn Quartet

Hyperion CDA68221 145:21 mins (2 discs)



By far the most famous among this great set of string quartets is the 'Lark' Op. 64 No. 5

– so called for the soaring violin tune near its beginning. Haydn composed these works in 1790, when his circumstances were rapidly changing: Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, his employer for nearly 30 years, died that year, and Haydn found himself free to ply his trade elsewhere. The popular cut of the 'Lark', with its helter-skelter finale,

shows his wish to now find a wider public even for his chamber music. Several of these quartets were actually performed during his first London visit in 1791-93.

More ambiguous in tone than the 'Lark' is Op. 64's second quartet, its cheerful opening unaccompanied violin tune, seemingly in a bright D major, abruptly interrupted by a dramatic chord from the remaining players which throws the music into its actual, and much darker, key of B minor. Haydn's tempo marking for the movement is *Allegro spiritoso*, but you'd never guess it from the London Haydn Quartet's lugubrious performance. It's hard to know how the players can have misjudged the music's character to such a degree. The drama and wit of Haydn's music are sorely lacking in these accounts as a whole, with only the *presto* finales of the fourth and sixth quartets imparting a feeling of genuine energy. Elsewhere, lethargic tempos and seriously underplayed dynamic contrasts make for a rather dispiriting experience. *Misha Donat*
PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mozart • Weber

Clarinet Quintets

Julian Bliss (clarinet);
 Carducci Quartet
Signum Records SIGCD 552 58:53 mins



Inspired by his friendship with clarinetist Anton Stadler, Mozart not only invented the genre of clarinet quintet but resolved at a stroke the problems of integrating the clarinet line into the string texture to an extent unmatched until Brahms's great work of a century later. Intervening quintets by such composers as Weber and Spohr tended to resort to a simpler, more concertante concept, with strings mainly deployed as accompaniment to the clarinet.

So Julian Bliss sounds well to the fore in the Weber Clarinet Quintet in B flat. Completed in 1815 for the clarinet virtuoso Heinrich Baermann, this is a genial, tuneful work making no great claims to depth, though its crepuscular slow movement is a gem of early Romanticism. Riding the Carducci Quartet's neatly articulated or sensitively sustained accompaniments, Bliss tackles the score with a piercingly pure, vibrato-

less tone, suitably veiled for the *Adagio*, yet rising effortlessly to the virtuoso cartwheels near the end of the finale. Such timbral focus places a premium on precise intonation, and just occasionally Bliss appears to play slightly 'under the note'. But there is no hint of this in the Mozart Quintet. Here he deploys the so-called basset clarinet that Stadler favoured, with an extra four bottom notes – and wonderfully cavernous they sound. Yet the whole reading has a pleasing impulse, balance and bloom, while the serene beauty these players find in the last bars of the *Larghetto* amounts to a mystery. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Schubert

String Quartets: No. 9 in G minor; No. 14 in D minor (Death and the Maiden)
 Chiaroscuro Quartet
BIS-2268 (hybrid CD/SACD)
 62:47 mins



Just nine years separate Schubert's G minor Quartet of 1815 from his *Death and*

the Maiden Quartet. The distance travelled is colossal, yet there is so much of the later Schubert in the G minor Quartet composed when he was just 18; there is also his clear love of Mozart, in particular the great G minor Symphony, and admiration for Haydn in the slow movement and finale. The Chiaroscuro Quartet are particularly good at capturing the more forward-looking moments, notably the miniature but visionary development of the first movement. Their use of gut strings and a historically-informed approach produces focused tone throughout; the playing might seem hard-edged at times, but their rhythmic poise is a constant delight and they are always responsive to the interplay between individual lines

Inevitably, their approach in *Death and the Maiden* is more intense; the first movement, fast in tempo but with flawless figuration, is particularly impressive. The same concentration carries through into variations of the slow movement; here rather more contrast in dynamics and more of a presence from the first violin might have produced some welcome moments of serenity. The *Scherzo* returns

Reissues Reviewed by Nicholas Anderson



Dutilleux Youthful Pages
Indésens INDE 087 (2015) 58:42 mins

A feast for fans of the French tradition of wind playing, with pieces for piano, flute, oboe, bassoon and trombone in a conspectus of chamber music written 1942-50, featuring pianist *Pascal Godart*. ★★★★★



Dvořák String Quintets; String Quartets
Harmonia Mundi HMG 501509-10 (1997)
 133:37 mins (2 discs)

In this rewarding album, the *Melos Quartet* play chamber music from the 1870s and '80s, crowned by the Piano Quintet in A major with its dumka second movement. ★★★★★



Louis-Antoine Dornel Suites for traverso
Glossa Cabinet GCD c80806 (2000) 147:82 mins
 Rameau's little-known contemporary wrote eloquently for flute. *Wilbert Hazelzet* and his players expressively convey the airy character of the music, reflecting its Regency elegance and gesture. ★★★★★



Telemann Voyageur virtuose: Sonates en deo et trio
Evidence Classics EVCD041 (2007) 57:16 mins
 Four of Telemann's *Essercizii Musici* Sonatas are the chief beneficiaries in lively and stylish performances by *Ensemble Amarillis* whose instruments include recorder, oboe, violin, cello and harpsichord. ★★★★★

to the impressive impetus of the first movement while the Trio has moments of exquisite tenderness. Some may find the Chiaroscuro's approach a little relentless, and the sound could certainly have been more resonant, but on its own terms this is a richly compelling account. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★

In the Theatre of Air

Works by A Beach, Bowler, Musgrave, G Rodgers, Tann and Weir

Marsyas Trio
NMCNMCD248 60:54 mins



Celebrating women composers in the centenary year of female suffrage in the UK, this CD includes three commissions by the Marsyas Trio. Georgia Rogers's *York Minster* uses pitches derived from the building's acoustic fingerprint: if that sounds dry and scientific, the result is a haunting processional, giving a sense of the vast space of the building. The seven short sections of Tann's *In the Theatre of*

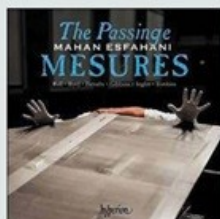
Air are a response to descriptions of different birds by the American poet Mary Oliver, but also carry elements of her interest in Japanese culture, especially in the *shakuhachi*-flavoured melodic shapes given to the flute and the sparse textures, sometimes sounding as if painted with the single hair of a brush.

The performers sound more in their skin in Bowler's edgy and often violent *Salutem*, with its extended instrumental techniques, vocal interjections, amplification and electronics. Although its theatrical elements miss out a little in an audio-only recording, its five movements, which reflect periods of history from the Stone Age to the Modern Age, do pack a punch, especially in the hammering of the Industrial Revolution.

The programme is bookended by Musgrave's lyrical *Canta, Canta!*, and salon-like pieces by Amy Beach. Weir's *Several Concertos* gives each player a mini-concerto of their own: there could be more of a spotlight on each soloist in the recording, but the music's inventive humour still comes across. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE



Expressive strokes on an Olde English canvas

Mahan Esfahani blows the dust off virginalist classics, and *Kate Bolton-Porciatti* is impressed



Hats off to him: Mahan Esfahani is on colourful form

The Passing Mesures

Works by Bull, Byrd, Dowland, Farnaby, Gibbons, Ingham and Tomkins
Mahan Esfahani (harpsichord)

Hyperion CDA68249 77:43 mins

The Passing Mesures roams through England's musical landscape around the time of Shakespeare, John Donne and Sir Thomas More. It's a compendium of keyboard works by the so-called 'English virginalists' – Bull, Byrd, Farnaby, Gibbons, Ingham and Tomkins – whose music speaks with a quiet power. There are pastoral evocations of fair Albion alongside darker suggestions of its 'woods so wild', dances by turns stately and sprightly, daringly inventive fantasies, and brooding streams of consciousness that capture the melancholy spirit of the age. These works have sometimes been handled as trifles or decorative miniatures, but Iranian-American harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani treats them as profoundly expressive and introspective works. Here measured, there free, his readings highlight the ebb and flow of their poetry and prose; phrases are rhetorically articulated. Esfahani's

Esfahani heightens the harpsichord's orchestral potential

muscular technique enhances the robust rhythms of popular dances like the galliard, jig and romanesca, and his response to Byrd's hexachord fantasy is visceral rather than cerebral.

We hear two instruments here: a copy of an English virginals from 1642, its sound alert and transparent, and a double-manual harpsichord based on a German original of 1710. The latter brags a palette of colours

and timbres not available to Byrd and his contemporaries, allowing Esfahani to heighten the harpsichord's orchestral potential – most strikingly in the works by Tomkins, with their painterly hues. Though the choice is anachronistic – the instrument beefing up what would have been a more intimate soundworld – Esfahani's performances are so persuasive that it is hard to raise any strong objection.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★



Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the *BBC Music Magazine* website at www.classical-music.com

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas Nos 30-32

Alexandre Tharaud (piano)

Erato 9029563382 61:59 mins plus DVD



Tharaud's Beethoven is unfailingly neat and elegant, but rather misses the point. These

three late sonatas should take us into remarkable emotional territory. The triptych dates from 1820 to 1822, after the mighty *Hammerklavier* Sonata, and during a fruitful period that produced the *Missa solemnis* and the last string quartets. They find Beethoven wrestling the sonata form into structures inseparable from their thematic material, distilling ideas into two movements instead of three and playing with variations and fugues.

Tharaud's first foray into solo Beethoven follows an extensive and often rewarding discography including Couperin and Pécou. This is a very nicely-produced album, well recorded, and his playing is nimble and thoughtful. But the E major Sonata, Op. 109, lacks a certain vocal quality and luminosity. I wasn't convinced, either, by some of the tempos in the A flat Sonata, Op. 110, though Tharaud taps into the well of emotion in the concluding Adagio and Fugue. The final Sonata, Op. 111, is magisterial and serene, Tharaud bringing out something of the piece's surprising modernity.

The 64-minute bonus DVD, filmed in a building of dilapidated grandeur, is atmospheric in a way with the Steinway gleaming in the pale light coming through the windows; I'm not sure, though, what visuals of dusty old books, dripping water and leaves in puddles have to do with Beethoven. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE

★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

Chopin

Nocturnes Nos 1-9;

Nocturne in C minor

Ingrid Fliter (piano)

Linn CKD 565 107:07 mins (2 discs)



As winner of the silver medal in the 2000 Warsaw Piano Competition, Ingrid Fliter

comes highly recommended, nor will studies with Louis Lortie, Zoltán

NEW RELEASES FROM IRELAND

Kocsis and Alfred Brendel have exactly spoiled her chances. There will also be Chopin lovers who find her Nocturnes very much to their taste – that I acknowledge. But sadly not to mine.

My problem is with her rhythms. It's a curious fact that when pianists play concertos or chamber music, for the most part they play what's in front of them. But give them a solo spot, and their rhythms often become self-indulgent. So it is here. The B major Nocturne Op. 32/1 is one sufferer. I concede that one can argue endlessly over the meaning of 'Andante sostenuto': does this simply ask for *legato* playing, or should the discourse be free of persistent hesitations and unmarked lengthening of notes (aka 'bumps in the road')? And what about 'tranquillo, in tempo'?

It all comes down to a question of taste, about which, as we know, there can be no disputing. So I won't go on. Except to confess that I was unable to last the course of two whole discs and sought solace in Moiseiwitsch's 1940 recording of the famous E flat Nocturne: elegant, respectful, its rhythmic nuances wisely observing the law of diminishing returns. As always, and for all the right reasons, it brought tears to my eyes.

Roger Nichols

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★
★★★★

Liszt • Schubert • C & R Schumann

Liszt: *Soirées de Vienne*;

Schubert: *Valses sentimentales*

– selection; *Trauerwalzer*; *Auf dem*

Wasser zu singen; *Ständchen*;

C Schumann: *Scherzo No. 2*,

Op. 14; *Lieder* (arr. Liszt)

R Schumann: *Humoreske*;

Zemlinsky: *Albumblatt*

William Youn (piano)

Sony 19075860902 67:47 mins



This imaginative recital reveals the stylistic connections which bound four major European musical figures. Songs, dances, and 'pure' piano music are interwoven in this tapestry of pieces. We're still too fixated on the idea of individual genius, so it's wonderful to hear a recital which so eloquently reminds us that all artists feed off of each other's ideas.

The flow through the recital is shaped by key, mood, texture

and musical personality. Youn begins almost imperceptibly with Schumann's *Humoreske* Op. 20, a mercurial, exuberant 1839 piano cycle. A selection of 13 of Schubert's *Valses sentimentales* come next, then some Liszt arrangements of songs by Schubert and Clara Schumann. Clara Schumann's own Op. 2 reminds us of her prominent place in the glittery world of virtuoso pianism. Liszt's showpiece *Soirées de Vienne*, neatly closes the recital by recalling the world of Schubert waltzes.

This programming brings out the best in the individual pieces. For example, I usually find that Liszt over-eggs the pudding in his transcriptions, but Youn's thoughtful, unhurried playing conveys the artistic debt to the lyricism of the Schumann's and Schubert. Equally, Clara Schumann's unique approach to virtuosic piano-writing sits brilliantly alongside Liszt.

Altogether, Youn's light-fingered performance is delightful. He slips easily between limpid tenderness, dance-like playfulness, and sparkling virtuosity. The nostalgic 'bonus' track, Alexander Zemlinsky's 1895 'Memories of Vienna', is heart-breakingly gorgeous. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★

Messiaen

La Nativité du Seigneur

Richard Gowers (organ)

King's College Cambridge KGS 0025

67:40 mins



La Nativité du Seigneur is no stranger to King's College Chapel. As Richard Gowers observes

in his engaging performer's notes, 'Dieu parmi nous', the ecstatically rip-roaring final movement of Messiaen's Christmas cycle, has regularly featured as a voluntary after the annual Nine Lessons and Carols. Moreover, one of the first recordings of *La Nativité* was made by one of Gowers's predecessors as organ scholar, Simon Preston.

Captured in 2017, while Gowers was still an undergraduate, this recording is an impressive achievement with much fine playing. The organ at King's is not, of course, a French Cavaillé-Coll instrument, but it has a rich palette

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THE BAND OF THE IRISH DEFENCE FORCES: RHAPSODIC WINDS

RTE lyric fm CD157



Founded in 1923, the first director of the Irish Army School of Music was the German musician Col W. F. Brase. He set the precedent for commissioning works by Irish and international composers based on Irish melodies, articulating the spirit of the new republic in music. Now for the first time a selection of the most popular and iconic of these compositions is available on CD.

CAMERATA KILKENNY: THE PIPER AND THE FAIRY QUEEN

RTE lyric fm CD156



Recommended by BBC Radio 3 as "... a highly enjoyable meeting of traditions..." and a Classic FM pick of the week, this CD explores the common heritage of traditional Irish tunes and Baroque dances with repertoire ranging from Handel, Purcell and Telemann to works by the blind harper Turlough O'Carolan. Camerata Kilkenny is joined on this recording by David Power, a leading exponent of Ireland's traditional instrument, the uilleann pipes.

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of colour, and a sense of power when needed. The low reeds growl with wonderful menace in 'Jésus accepte la souffrance' before being overtaken by the movement's resplendent conclusion. That Gowers is often unhurried is certainly not a problem in Messiaen's music, but the individual notes should have a sense of line in 'Desseins éternels', and the wise men's trudge is a little too pedestrian in 'Les mages'. Nonetheless, the opening flourishes of 'Le Verbe' fly joyfully into the rafters and 'Dieu parmi nous' is suitably jubilant.

Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas

Jean Rondeau (harpsichord)

Erato 9029563368 81:21 mins



Jean Rondeau loves to cut a dash, always beginning with his hair. His liner-note is no less arresting,

being a long and didactic epistle from Domenico Scarlatti to his royal pupil Dona Maria Bárbara, in which he explains in florid detail the principles underlying his art. But the letter is fictitious, and presumably written by Rondeau. And if that's the case, it offers a hostage to fortune – an invitation to listeners to measure his achievement against his high-flown aspiration.

'Music is like a mysterious shadow floating above our souls... The instrument becomes almost human when it curls graciously under our fingers, like water embraces the receptacle in which it is poured... once the string is plucked, you have

got to recreate a moment of silence... you create a limitless universe made of micro-silences singing joyfully together... work on your sound... the improvisational gesture can help us...'

That's the theory. In practice, he begins with a rendition of K208 whose ponderousness twice brings it almost to a halt, followed by more sonatas whose tempos drag painfully. The virtuosic K141 has spring-heeled moments, but its flight is marred by melodramatic pauses, obtrusive ornamentation, and a long interpolated trill. K213 floats untethered in the ether, but its glacial pace precludes the graceful swing it ought to have.

Then comes an 'interlude' consisting of a few random modernistic phrases, after which, having established his 'originality', he settles down and plays very nicely. The second half of this double-disc release is genuinely



Light-fingered:
William Youn is
eloquence itself

pleasurable, with a splendidly imposing 'Cat's fugue', and ending with an account of K481 in F minor whose sweet seriousness touches the heart. Michael Church

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

Piano Magic

Works by Bach, Chopin, Holst, Joplin, Liszt and Mozart

Lang Lang (piano)

Sony 19075862332 47:30 mins



There are things here to admire. Wherever the music challenges even Lang Lang's tremendous

technique – here in particular the three Liszt pieces – one is dazzled by the accuracy, the control of dynamics and the sheer exuberance of it all. Elsewhere, where he is given more time and space for imaginings of his own, I thought of Miss Jean Brodie's immortal words: 'For those who like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like.' The disc begins with Mozart's *Rondo alla turca*. Marked by him 'Allegretto', here it is despatched *Prestissimo*, a lot of sound and fury meaning very little, though the thunderous applauders obviously felt otherwise. The admittedly enigmatic structure of Chopin's E flat Nocturne Op. 55/2 defeats the pianist, not helped by his early application of *rallentando* in the final bars, his refusal to play the last line in tempo, and a really horrid caterwaul on the penultimate pedal release. The disc includes two arrangements, including the 'big tune' from 'Jupiter' in *The*

Planets, here given an astonishingly vulgar rendition. The compilation comprises five venues, so volume and acoustic are variable.

Roger Nichols

PERFORMANCE

★★

RECORDING

★★★★

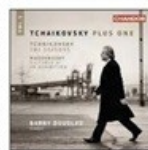
Tchaikovsky Plus One

Musorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition;

Tchaikovsky: The Seasons

Barry Douglas (piano)

Chandos CHAN 10991 77:45 mins



This first release in a new series finds Barry Douglas at his most arresting. Where some

pianists – Lydia Artymiw, for example, on one of Chandos's earliest releases – create a drawing-room intimacy in *The Seasons*, Douglas is closer to Viktoria Postnikova (Erato) in favouring a concert-hall style of projection. That said, he creates a gloriously veiled sonority in the minor-key introspection of June's outer sections and captures the hushed, meditative quality of March's lark-song with a velvety touch. Yet one senses a special emotional engagement when Tchaikovsky is at his most exuberant, as in February's carnival celebrations and the Schumannesque *moto perpetuo* of August's harvesting. The syncopated waltzing that evokes December's child-like sense of wonder is also handled with captivating ingenuousness.

Musorgsky's magnum opus requires pianism of dazzling virtuoso panache, and here Douglas is really in his element. He may not quite evoke the wild irascibility and devil-may-care unorthodoxy of the composer – Borodin, who was present at the first private performance, discovered several piano hammers had buckled under Musorgsky's pounding assault. Yet Douglas's supreme technical ease and tonal control when the notes start flying – as in the 'Ballet of the Chicks in their Shells', 'Limoges' and (especially) 'Baba Yaga' – brings a special sense of frisson. 'The Great Gate's climactic bell-pealing is projected with an intoxicating sense of time and place, captured in thrillingly expansive sound by Jonathan Cooper. Julian Haylock

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

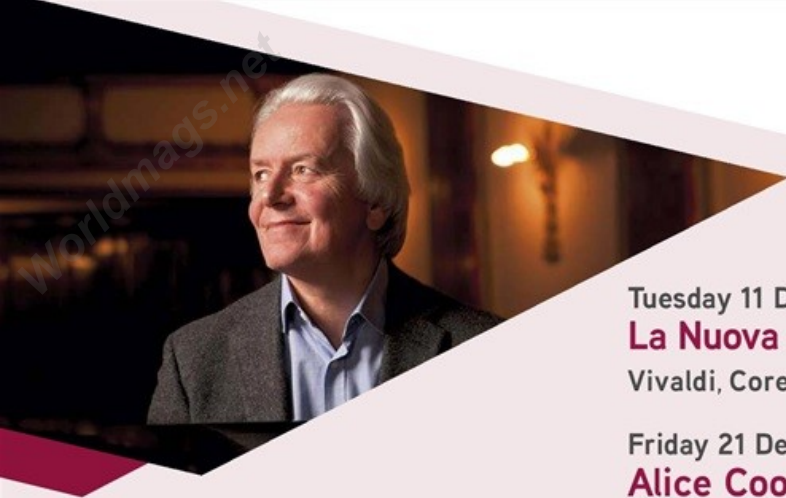
BACKGROUND TO...

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

Born in Naples, Scarlatti spent his early professional years as an organist. Aged 30 he moved to Venice to study with Gasparini, then relocated to Rome, taking his father's place as music director for Maria Casimira – Poland's exiled queen. He went on to become director of music at the Vatican's Julian Chapel. Royal appointments continued with a move to Lisbon



to work for the Portuguese royal family. Princess Maria Bárbara, later the Queen of Spain, is the dedicatee of the majority of his harpsichord sonatas and it is for these many works he is most celebrated today.



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THE WORLD OF JS BACH – THURINGIA & SAXONY

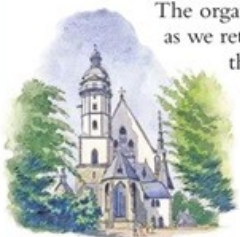
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222 CDs plus one DVD and two books

They're calling it the largest, most complete, most authoritative and enriched composer set of all time, and let's get something clear from the outset; unless you have a serious allergy to Bach you will want this set. Whether or not you *need* it is the issue, so let's take a couple of tours through the box and see whether that can help you decide.

Lift off the lid and you're presented with a kind of Venetian Rialto Bridge of a layout, the books in the middle and 222 CDs cascading downwards on either side, in four sections, the first of which is dedicated to Bach's Sacred Cantatas. That in itself gives pause for thought: 25 years ago we'd never have had anything like the riches available to us today, and immediately you begin to realise the ambition of the planning. The curators have gone for mainstream, modern, period instrument Bach as the backbone – a complete edition in modern performances, but they've not limited themselves to what's available in the Universal back catalogue, licensing widely to get the things they want. Sir John Eliot Gardiner's Cantata Pilgrimage is the heart of the Cantatas, many recorded for his Soli Deo Gloria label... a delicious irony, as he only formed the label when DG pulled the plug on the project. But they've also bought in some of the best from Masaaki Suzuki's Cantata cycle for BIS, as well as Ton Koopman, Joshua Rifkin, Philippe Herreweghe, Sigiswald Kuijken and others – and that's just the main course.

Listen and learn

Every section of Bach 333 also has a brown 'historic' supplement exploring performance traditions and recorded history – documents such as Mengelberg conducting parts of the *St Matthew Passion* in 1930s Amsterdam, cantatas conducted by Fritz Lehman, Werner, Münchinger, Richter,



Suite treat: Giuliano Carmignola features on brand new recordings for the box

Marriner and Benjamin Britten. You end up exploring the highways and byways of the brown bits of the box, sitting on the floor surrounded by CDs, ears full of performances going back over 70 years that you may never have heard before.

There's a huge amount to read while you're listening: the complete texts and translations, full documentation of the recordings, and the two hardback books in the middle – Dorothea Schröder's lavishly illustrated biography, essays from the Leipzig Bach Archive, Christoph Wolff on what we're missing from Bach's output, and Nicholas Kenyon's Faber Bach guide, newly updated, plus a new edition of the

BWV catalogue of works ahead of its official publication.

So, let's try another trip through the set with the solo violin and cello suites and see what happens. The core sets are two new recordings, from violinist Giuliano Carmignola (simultaneously released separately so his fans won't have to get the big box if they don't want to), and – brilliantly – cellist David Watkin, licensed from Resonus. But then you start wondering what's in the

brown 'Instrumental Traditions' section,

and you find violinists Milstein and Grumiaux, Kremer, Mullova, Batiashvili,

Jansen; cellist Pierre Fournier's complete set alongside Casals, Starker and Maurice Gendron.

While we're there let's check out the keyboard works... Helmut Walcha's pioneering Bach recordings dating back to the first Archiv recording in 1947 on historic instruments, alongside Marcel Dupré, Jean Guillou, Karl Richter and Marie-Claire Alain; they're so intriguing you may end up spending more time in the archive than the mainstream recordings.

Omissions and additions

It's almost graceless – if not pointless – thinking about what you'd have picked if you were compiling the set, and I'm sure more than a few critics will point out that Glenn Gould is a major omission...but then you've already got all the Gould you need, haven't you? Probably. That's an issue, actually, because Bach enthusiasts have a problem: they'll already have a lot of these recordings, but they'll still want this box because it's just so desirable.

I'm not going to list more of the essential catalogue; you can explore it for yourself on the helpful website bach333.com. Suffice to say everything is here, in 280 hours of music from 750 performers and 32 record labels, including ten hours of completely new recordings and seven world premieres. But I will just touch on another unexpected delight: the two supplements... *Bach Interactive* explores early influences on the composer – with music from Buxtehude, Telemann and Vivaldi, through to the wider Bach family – while *Bach After Bach* looks at the influence of Bach on his own sons and far beyond. From Mozart and Mahler to transcriptions by Reger and Stokowski to Maxwell Davies, Arvo Pärt, Judith Weir and Bartók, it also takes in *Bach à la Jazz*, with appearances by Claude Bolling, Jacques Loussier, George Shearing and Oscar Peterson.

All you have to do now is decide whether or not you can afford it, or who's going to buy it for you for Christmas. Then where to put it; it should really come with four screw-in legs and a glass top, plus a pair of espresso cups so you can listen to BWV 211. Go on, look it up... maybe your own Bach journey starts here.



Brief notes

Our collection of 25 further reviews this month features a flurry of festive fare

Beethoven String Quartets

Elias String Quartet

Wigmore Hall Live WHLive0092/2



Vibrant, alert, brilliant Beethoven from the Elias String Quartet in their fifth volume of the complete cycle, recorded live at the Wigmore Hall. It's a series you'll want on your shelves. (RF) ★★★★★

Rhett Brewer The Thaw

The Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra/Stephen Hussey, et al

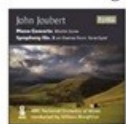
HP Recordings HP3300001



This disc, although lively and dramatic, sadly misses the mark. The swelling violins, wordless singing and electronic accompaniment feel too predictable, the transitions clumsy. (FP) ★★

John Joubert Piano Concerto; Symphony No. 3

BBC National Orchestra of Wales/William Boughton *Lyrta SRCD.367*



Martin Jones is scintillating in Joubert's spiky Piano Concerto, with its flashes of Prokofiev; the Symphony No. 3 is terrifically characterful. (OC) ★★★★★

LE Larsson Symphony No. 3, etc

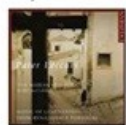
Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Manze *CPO 777 673-2*



Swedish composer Larsson's music is richly scored, huge in scale and full of interesting harmonic twists. The Symphony will appeal to newcomers, but the bleak *Adagio* is my highlight. (OC) ★★★★★

Pater Peccavi Works by Morago, Lobo, Fernandez et al

The Marian Consort/Rory McCleery *Delphian DCD34205*



Exemplary one-to-a-part performances of Portuguese Renaissance repertoire, much of which will be unfamiliar to many. The singing is as impassioned as it is effortlessly elegant. (JP) ★★★★★

Steve Reich Drumming

KUNIKO Linn CKD 582



KUNIKO performs all 13 parts of Reich's minimalist work herself, using multi-tracking to great effect. It is dynamic and less aggressive than other versions; a very calming listen. (FP) ★★★★★

Schreker The Birthday of the Infanta (Suite), etc

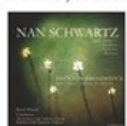
Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra/JoAnn Falletta *Naxos 8.573821*



Stirring, sumptuous performances show off Schreker's lush scoring and vivid orchestral picture-painting. You may, though, shed a few tears: the Infanta's birthday is not a happy occasion. (JP) ★★★★★

N Schwartz - Broadstock

Synchron Stage Orchestra/Kevin Purcell, et al *Divine Art DDA 25165*



Evocative and tuneful music from Schwartz and Broadstock, with the former's given a top drawer reading by some of Vienna's finest players. A disc I'd definitely spin again. (MB) ★★★★★

Stravinsky Le sacre du printemps; L'oiseau de feu

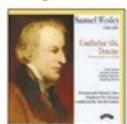
Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/Mariss Jansons *BR Klassik 900168*



Two perennial classics in a live recording. The *Rite* is rather less feverish than I would like, but still a masterful performance under Jansons. (MB) ★★★★★

Wesley Confitebor tibi, etc

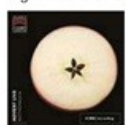
Portsmouth Choral Union, et al *Priority PRCD 1186*



An exact contemporary of Haydn's *The Creation*, Wesley's work is pleasant but decidedly unmemorable. An unwieldy-sized chorus and bathroom-like recorded sound don't help its cause here. (JP) ★★

Advent Live Works by Britten, Gibbons, et al

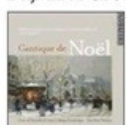
The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge/Andrew Nethsingha *Signum SIGCD535*



Sung with typical St John's verve and character, this superbly programmed collection will take your Advent listening in unexpected, but entirely apposite, directions. (JP) ★★★★★

Cantique de Noël Works by Berlioz, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, et al

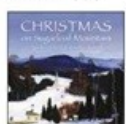
Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge/Geoffrey Webber, et al *Delphian DCD34197*



Pleasingly familiar tunes, *en français*, beautifully sung and richly accompanied. This is very much what Christmas music should be. (MB) ★★★★★

Christmas on Sugarloaf Mountain Folk Carols

Apollo's Fire/Jeanette Sorrell, et al *Avie AV2396*



A zinging cross-cultural celebration that takes us from memories of Christmas Eve in Old Ireland to Christmas morning in Appalachia. (RF) ★★★★★

The Darkest Midnight Songs

Papagena *SOMM Recordings SOMMCD 0189*



A disc of stark contrasts; the largely bleak (mid-winter) programme is enlivened by moments of welcome warmth and light. (MB) ★★★★★

Direct Message Works by Maxwell-Davies, Enescu, et al

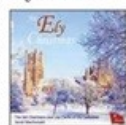
Matilda Lloyd (trumpet), John Reid (piano) *Orchid Classics ORC100089*



Matilda Lloyd's debut is a dynamic showcase of established and newly composed trumpet repertoire. A very engaging listen. (FP) ★★★★★

An Ely Christmas Carols

The Girl Choristers and Lay Clerks of Ely Cathedral *Regent REGCD527*



Some terrific arrangements and original carols here – a refreshing break from the usual seasonal offering. The girl choristers produce a beautiful, blended sound. (OC) ★★★★★

Folkjul II: A Swedish Folk Christmas Hymns and Chorales

St Jacobs Chamber Choir, et al *BIS-2334*



Put on some warm knitwear and pop this disc in for the ultimate Swedish Christmas. The joyful, jaunty mix of hymns and chorales, with a folk twist, is sure to make you smile. (RF) ★★★★★

A German Christmas 17th-century music

Margaretha Consort *Naxos 8.551398*



Christmas in 17th-century Germany was clearly musically rich. This neatly performed programme contrasts intimate ensemble-work with more dramatic congregational items. (OC) ★★★★★

Music for Windy Instruments Sounds for the Court of James I

The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble *Resonus RES10225*



Is the title of this album an allusion to the king's reported flatulence? I do hope so. The florid music, by English and European composers, is deftly, thrillingly performed. (OC) ★★★★★

The Mystery of Christmas Greek Kalanda by Cilia Petridou

Jenni Harper, Lesley-Jane Rogers, Alison Smart (sopranos), et al *Divine Art dda 25186*



Simple settings for soprano and piano that reveal their composer's Greek-Cypriot heritage. One for those who prefer a more restrained Christmas. (JP) ★★★★★

The Nutcracker and I

Music by Tchaikovsky
Alexandra Dariescu (piano), et al
Signum Classics SIGCD542



The perfect Christmas disc for tiny humans. A narrator tells the story of the

Nutcracker over Dariescu's sensitive playing. A really thoughtful set of illustrated programme notes, too. (FP) ★★★★★

Prism I Works by Beethoven, Shostakovich and JS Bach

Danish String Quartet ECM2561



The first album in a series, linking Bach to Beethoven and other composers. Shostakovich is first

up, in a performance that's fragile, fierce and piercing. The Beethoven is robust. (RF) ★★★★★

Snow Queens Seasonal and Winter Music

Juice Vocal Ensemble

Resonus Classics RES10224



With voices as sharp and bright as winter sun on snow, Juice Vocal Ensemble's seasonal album

sparkles. There's a lot of new music to explore here, including pieces by Emily Hall and Alison Willis. (RF) ★★★★★

Star of Wonder Christmas Carols

Chor Leoni/Erick Lichte

CHOR LEONI CLR1809



A set of unusual arrangements of traditional Christmas carols, varying in their

success. The piano accompaniment somewhat lets the performances down – the *a cappella* pieces are much more powerful. (FP) ★★★★★

Twelve Piano Prisms

Piano works by Tanya Ekanayaka

Tanya Ekanayaka (piano)

Grand Piano GP785

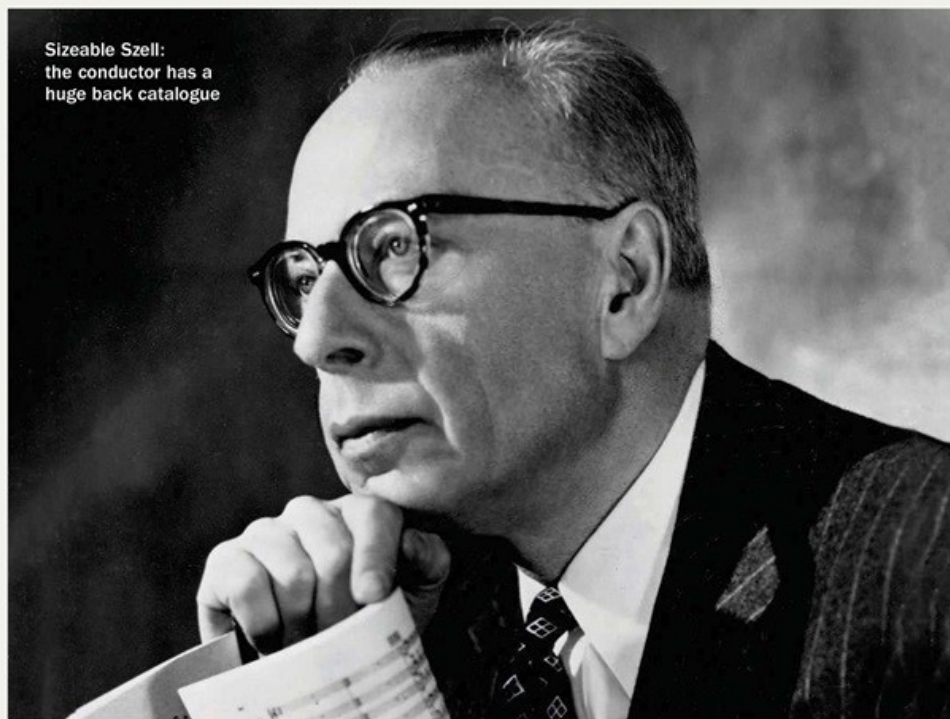


Ancient melodies and modern musicality combine in this vivid and imaginative pianistic

exploration from the composer/pianist. (MB) ★★★★★

Reviews: Michael Beek (MB), Oliver Condy (OC), Rebecca Franks (RF), Freya Parr (FP), Jeremy Pound (JP)

The month in box-sets



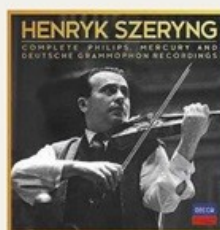
Sizeable Szell: the conductor has a huge back catalogue

Szell's bells and Szeryng with friends

This month's round-up also sees anniversary nods to two composers

George Szell presided over The Cleveland Orchestra from 1946 until his death in 1970 and **The Complete Columbia Album Collection** (Sony 88985471852) takes in recordings from across that long tenure. Szell transformed the orchestra into one of America's finest and their recording output was vast. The repertoire across the 106-discs is rich and varied (there's even a short festive selection), with appearances by the Budapest String Quartet, Columbia Symphony and New York Philharmonic.

Henryk Szeryng is the focus of a new set gathering his **Complete Philips, Mercury and Deutsche Grammophon Recordings** (Decca 483 4194). The 44-disc collection presents just shy of a couple of decades of recordings across the three labels and is very smartly presented; it's also easy to navigate thanks to clear (and colourful) spine detail and an unusually roomy box. Content-wise it's a broad mix, with concertos by Sibelius, Berg, Schumann, Saint-Saëns, Wieniawski, Szymanowski and – of course – Brahms and Beethoven. A highlight is the 1964 *Treasures for the Violin*.



The repertoire is rich and varied across the 106-disc Szell set

Rather less easy to navigate is the new celebration of **Gioachino Rossini** (Warner Classics 90295611156), a weighty 50-disc box which sees the sleeves so tightly packed that they'll surely suffer wear and tear from all the inevitable pulling about and thumbing through. That said, the set – released to mark 150 years since the composer's death – is a wealth of riches that takes in opera, choral, song, chamber and instrumental writing. There's

star appeal, too, with the likes of Callas, Bartoli, Netrebko, Caballé, Hampson, Gedda, Antonio Pappano and Roger Norrington.

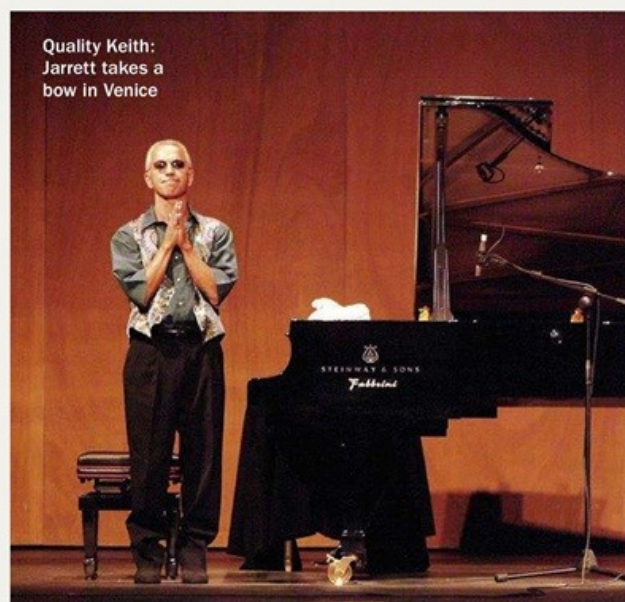
Some 200 years before Rossini's death, **François Couperin** was born – a new box (Erato 9029561116) celebrates his 350th birthday. The bulk of this 16-disc set sees harpsichordist Laurence Boulay performing complete recordings of Couperin's plentiful keyboard works, while the likes of Pinchas Zukerman, Lynn Harrell, Les Arts Florissants and Les Talens Lyriques feature on a handful of surrounding discs of notable historical and choral recordings.

Barry Witherden casts his critical ear over the month's newest jazz releases

JAZZ CHOICE

Divine in Venice

Pianist Keith Jarrett's sensational solo 2006 concert has been released for the first time



Quality Keith: Jarrett takes a bow in Venice

KEITH JARRETT LA FENICE 100



Keith Jarrett

La Fenice
Keith Jarrett (piano)
ECM 676 5853 (2 discs)

Keith Jarrett, a prodigy playing challenging classical works and original compositions in public aged six, began exploring jazz at 15. His contribution

to the late-'60s Charles Lloyd Quartet and his previous work with drummer Art Blakey. His assured technique and adroit stylistic admixture, encompassing hard-bop, blues, free-jazz and contemporary classical elements, stood out among a generation of impressive pianists. After his involvement in the Miles Davis Live-Evil band, he continued recording in several contexts for several labels, notably ECM, establishing his reputation as a highly virtuosic, cerebral, rather prickly solo performer and leader of the 'Standards Trio'.

Recorded in 2006, La Fenice found him firmly in that territory, but with the somewhat passionless yet exhibitionist cast of some of his most famous recordings displaced by affecting playing, imbuing enthralling, imaginative development and rich tone with real feeling. Some tracks have a strongly lyrical classical quality; others echo the percussive harmonic complexity of the post-Cecil-Taylor school, all united by depth of feeling and breadth of imagination. This is Jarrett on splendid form. ★★★★★

Christmas round-up



Like Jarrett, Austrian guitarist **Wolfgang Muthspiel** has classical music in his background,

and studied at Berklee and the New England Conservatory. **Where The River Goes** comprises six compositions by Muthspiel, one by the band's pianist Brad Mehldau, and 'Clearing', an exemplary group improvisation. The quintet (Ambrose Akinmusire, Larry Grenadier and Eric Harland) adds up to something of a dream-team. Regardless of influences, background and other baggage, this is a programme of utterly absorbing, atmospheric, frequently beautiful music, realised by highly-accomplished musicians whose skills are so poised and secure that they never need to grandstand, though they can certainly cut loose when necessary, as on Mehldau's 'Blueshead'. It's missed our Choice status by the merest whisker. (ECM 675 1712 ★★★★★)

At 23, pianist **James Francies** has an impressive track record in jazz, hip-hop and other genres, even without allowing for his relatively tender years. On **Flight** he's flanked



by a sturdy rhythm section of bassist Burniss Travis II and drummer Jeremy Dutton, with guests including guitarist Mike Moreno on some tracks. This is a programme of impeccably-crafted compositions given attractive, fluent and elegant treatments by musicians who sound as if they were born to play together. (Blue Note 677 4134 ★★★★★)

In 2015, inspired by Tchaikovsky's similar 1876 project, **Ben Wendel** created videos of 12 duets, month-by-month. Critical and popular success of **The Seasons** led him to develop the project into these quintet performances. Where Tchaikovsky titles each piano piece saxophonist Wendel leaves us to form our own interpretations, or just enjoy the music for its own sake. He conjures images for each

month that don't chime with mine, but then I don't live in Brooklyn, and the original pieces portray the musicians as much as the months' characteristics anyway. Bravura performances add up to a satisfying



suite, variously bustling, edgy, light-hearted, vigorous or reflective. (Motema

MTM0309 ★★★★★)

Time was when over-dubbing and jazz-rock with prog-rock leanings was sneezed at in jazz circles. Neither causes much affront these days, and both are included on **New Life**, the second album by **Flying Machines**. The metal-plated title track grabs your lapels and holds on tightly. 'Moondust' shows the band



in gentler mood, whilst 'Elation' folds in various approaches against a minimalist

riff. The album proceeds with atmospheric ballad-like pieces and some collective improvisation. This showcase for their eclectic range is enjoyable, but next time it might be nice to hear them dig deeper into a more focused approach. (Ubuntu Music UBU0017 ★★★★★)

In the four years since guitarist **Ant Law**'s previous album, he has been busy as a sideman while, as he says, 'charging up' compositional ideas which now emerge as **Life I Know**. Law, too, is happy to include elements of rock ('Movies') and other genres, including South



Indian **konnakol** (vocalised percussion, performed by Asaf Sirkis) on the prelude to

the intriguing 'Laurvin Glaslowe'. 'Searching', a pastoral theme, slowly, subtly builds in intensity, as does 'Aquilinus', which has saxophonist Tim Garland guesting. The core of the album is the 12'37" 'The Act Itself' which unfurls like a tapestry full of individual incident but with a cohesive overall narrative. (Edition EDN1119 ★★★★★)



Rare ensemble:
Haden and Mehldau
made one album as a duo

From the archives

Geoffrey Smith listens afresh to a stunning pairing of pianist Brad Mehldau and bassist Charlie Haden



Savouring the live recording by the elite duo of Charlie Haden and Brad Mehldau, *Long Ago and Far Away* (Impulse 678 9500), I was reminded of a Wynton Marsalis remark about the young Louis Armstrong. Wynton said, 'Louis Armstrong didn't want to play "jazz"; he wanted to play whatever it was King Oliver was playing'. That's to say, what matters in music isn't the label or category, but the quality and character of the experience itself. In the case of both Haden and Mehldau that experience couldn't be more diverse: their backgrounds encompass country and western, pop, rock, classical and the avant-garde, all of it yielding a shared jazz language that's rich, intuitive and free.

On the face of it, their programme on this newly-issued Impulse recording of a concert given at a German festival in 2007 couldn't be more middle-of-the-road: six standards, comprising a Charlie Parker blues, two waltzes, two ballads, an up-tempo swinger. But from the first note, discovery is the name of the game. Parker's 'Au Privave' becomes a tongue-in-cheek abstraction on the blues, refusing an easy groove for Mehldau's teasing keyboard flights across the bar, in and out of tempo and tonality, underpinned by Charlie's pithy bass.

All the same, the partners never abandon a sense of clarity and structure. They truly play together and their whole performance celebrates the classic jazz virtues of space, time and melody. Both virtuosos of their instruments, they delight in beauty as well as ingenuity and wit. The waltzes – Irving Berlin's tender 'What'll I Do' and a Haden favourite, 'My Love and I' – have a lyrical lilt and piquancy, while the ballads – 'My Old Flame' and 'Everything Happens To Me' – are gorgeous without being saccharine, with the nuance and shading of real conversation.

Haden and Mehldau clearly had plenty to say to each other, relishing their only shared duo recording. The high point may be the title track, 'Long Ago and Far Away': swinging, subtle, joyous, the epitome of two masters simply making music together.

BBC
RADIO



The greatest jazz players and their music are explored in Geoffrey Smith's *Jazz*, a weekly programme broadcast on Saturdays from 12am-1am

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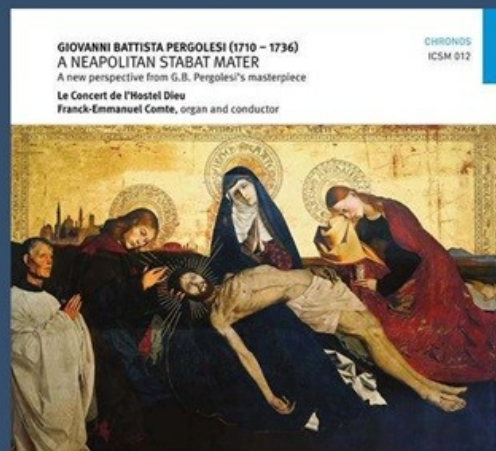
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Our critics cast their eyes over this month's selection of books on classical music

The Bear, the Piano, the Dog and the Fiddle

David Litchfield

Lincoln Children's Books

978-1-847-80917-9; 40pp (hb) £11.99

This is the sequel to the award-winning 2015 *The Bear and the Piano*, and it's every bit as poignant and joyful. Yes, it's aimed at a young picture-book audience, but this is a treat for any age. As David Litchfield



neatly puts it, 'good friendship, just like good music, lasts a lifetime'. At the heart of the tale are the elderly fiddle-playing

Hector and his faithful dog Hugo. Hector has given up performing, feeling downcast that he is 'yesterday's news' when compared to a world-famous piano-playing bear – our hero from the original book. Hugo secretly learns to play his friend's violin, and embarks on a life-changing concert tour with Bear's Big Band. Can Hector learn to be happy for Hugo, and will Hugo remember his old friend?

Litchfield's warm, richly coloured images are filled with gentle humour, while he packs plenty of emotion and nuance into his succinct text – and music has a starring role. You can read it as a standalone book, or in tandem with the earlier volume – which went on to become a bestseller, as this might well do too. Guaranteed to light up the darkest of winter evenings.

Rebecca Franks ★★★★★

Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times

Alan Walker

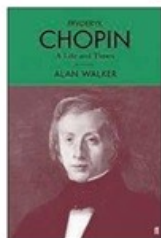
Faber & Faber 978-0-571-34855-8;

727pp (hb) £30

This absorbing study places Chopin's life very much within the context of the political and social background of his time. It presents an in-depth analysis of the composer's complex personality, taking into account invaluable primary sources, particularly concerning his early life in Poland,



some of which were not available to previous biographers. Such material is expertly harnessed with the objective of dispelling many long-standing misconceptions, not least those surrounding his turbulent



relationship with the novelist George Sand. Working in tandem with this narrative is a detailed appraisal of Chopin's compositional development, probing the most striking influences on his style, discussing in considerable detail aspects of his pianism, including his favoured instruments and approach to fingering, and assessing his achievement against that of his greatest contemporaries.

Following the structural pattern adopted in his mammoth three-volume study of Liszt, Alan Walker integrates these very different aspects into an entirely convincing entity. It's a measure of Walker's achievement that even in such a lengthy book, he keeps the reader fully engaged, presenting accessible and illuminating comments backed

up with the full weight of scholarly authority. Erik Levi ★★★★★

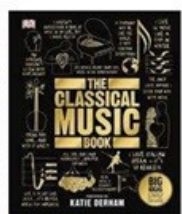
The Classical Music Book

Gareth Jones (Ed.)

Dorling Kindersley

978-0-241-30197-5; 352pp (hb) £17.99

What's the best way to cover the 1,000-year history of classical music in 350-or-so pages? Rather than simply begin at 1000AD and plod a joyless chronological narrative from there, this Dorling Kindersley guide introduces each period with a set of essays on pieces of music that in some way encapsulate the era in which they were written. The Baroque section, for instance, includes an exploration of why



Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is almost operatic in style, while the Modern section introduces the 12-tone scale via a look at Webern's *Symphonie* Op. 21. Clearly and concisely written throughout – and, hurrah, without pretension – the essays can be enjoyed on their own but also knit together coherently as

a whole, and there's an admirable consistency of tone and style. Admittedly, the design takes some getting used to. Every page is stuffed as full as a fridge at Christmas – a bit of breathing space might have been nice – and the shouty caps-lock page titles may not be everyone's taste. It is, however, an engaging and informative read.

Jeremy Pound ★★★★★

Angela Gheorghiu: A Life for Art

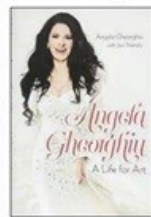
Angela Gheorghiu with Jon Tolansky

Fore Edge 978-1-611-68912-9; 229pp

(hb) £30

'Angela, of whom you may have heard a thing or two, is a continuation of Gina, of whom you are about to read... and reciprocally, Gina is a continuation of Angela', announces Angela Gheorghiu in the preface to her memoir, asserting 'for the first time, the libretto is all mine'. Somewhere, Craig Brown sharpens his pencil.

A Life for Art is co-written with Jon Tolansky, and presented as a



book-long Q&A. The prose jars (when Gheorghiu muses on her mother's imposed role as a housewife, the follow-up question is

'did your parents sing?') and the boxed-out marketing-style 'Angela feedback' offered by friends, family and colleagues (eg Bryn Terfel) does little to improve matters.

That said, the content isn't just PR puff. Gheorghiu shares insightful and interesting commentary on life in Communist Romania (including criticising a key establishment figure who sounds like a conservatoire's answer to Miss Trunchbull), her arrival at Covent Garden and work with notable musicians – with just enough information about her private life. Some readers will find the soprano's constant self-belief irritating but, judging by the success of her career, she may be onto something.

Claire Jackson ★★★★★

Audio gift guide

Indulge a loved one or, better still, spoil yourself this Christmas with the very best hi-fi products on the market selected by our audio expert *Chris Haslam*

THIS MONTH: CHRISTMAS GIFTS

ONE-BOX CD SYSTEM

Como Audio Musica £649

A welcome blend of cutting-edge technology, practicality and good old-fashioned push-buttons, the Musica sounds sublime and squeezes in CD player, ethernet connection for hi-res streaming, fully-featured DAB/DAB+/FM and Internet radio with reassuringly simple pre-set buttons, for catching and replaying the finest Radio 3 – or any one of 10,000 global radio stations – has to offer. Plus there's Bluetooth streaming, Spotify Connect, Wi-Fi connectivity and a 3.2-inch full-colour screen. About the only thing this all-in-one system can't do is conduct the orchestra.

comoaudio.co.uk



But can it conduct?:
The Musica can do
almost everything



GREAT-VALUE TURNTABLE

Audio Technica AT-LP3 £199

A superb-value belt-drive turntable that will give your old pile of records a new lease of life. At 5kg it has reassuring heft for a 'budget' design, and thanks to the removable head shell and adjustable tracking weights you can easily upgrade the cartridge when the time comes. That's not to say the supplied AT91 cartridge isn't good – in fact, given the price, you'll be rewarded with plenty of precision and detail, while the built-in phono stage means it will plug directly into your existing amplifier. audiotechnicashop.com

WIRELESS STREAMING SPEAKER

Ruark MRX £399

The MRX is a beautifully designed streaming speaker that makes the most of Wi-Fi and Bluetooth aptX connectivity (it can handle WAV, WMA, AAC, FLAC and MP3 files), so you're well catered for whether you enjoy listening to Internet radio, Spotify, Tidal or Primephonic, plus it can tap into a home network and play music stored on your computer or NAS drive. Most impressively, however, is the huge sound from a relatively compact cabinet that manages to recreate the scale and breadth of a concert hall, even in your kitchen. ruarkaudio.com



Seamless streaming:
the stylish Ruark MRX

LUXURY WIRELESS HEADPHONES Master & Dynamic MW50+ £369

Unusually, these sumptuously soft, luxury leather-clad Bluetooth (aptX hi-res) headphones come with two sets of lambskin ear pads – one on-ear and one over-ear – so you can not only find your perfect fit, but if you're going to be in a noisy environment the

over-ear all-encompassing pads help isolate more background and improve the already impressive performance. Rich, warm and comfortable for long enjoyable listening sessions, the battery will last 16 hours (there's a cable for wired playback) and they fold flat for added convenience.
masterdynamic.com

Canned luxury:
lambskin ear
pads as standard



ALL-IN-ONE SPEAKER SYSTEM KEF LSX £999

These speakers are the little siblings to one of my favourite products of the past decade – the flawless KEF LS50 Wireless. The LSX is a smaller, more affordable, better-looking pair of connected stereo streaming speakers that now sits firmly at the top of my (admittedly long) Christmas list. Shunning traditional hi-fi separates, the LSX cabinets feature 2 x 30W and 2 x 70W Class D amplifiers, unique four-inch Uni-Q drivers and the ability to stream virtually any format over Wi-Fi, Ethernet and CD-quality aptX Bluetooth – or via AUX and optical inputs. It's a stunning all-in-one wireless kit boasting exceptional hi-res audio performance (up to 192kHz/24bit) with none of the peripheral clutter. Available wrapped in luxury red, blue, black and green fabric or a classic high-gloss white, this stereo speaker system is refreshingly simple to set up and can all be controlled and updated using the Kef smartphone app (Android, iOS). kef.com



Green credentials:
KEF's LSX speakers



VIRTUAL ASSISTANT Amazon Echo Plus (version 2) £139

Voice control is here to stay – chances are, your next washing machine will even take orders – and while all current systems still struggle with the pronunciation of obscure Polish composers, at least the latest Alexa speaker sounds a whole lot better than the original designs. With Dolby powered 360-degree audio, Spotify and Amazon Music and the ability create a multi-room system with other speakers, Amazon has suddenly become a serious audio contender at a price few other brands can ever hope to match. amazon.co.uk



Sound assistant:
Apple's HomePod,
controlled by Siri

Sound assistants

Chris Haslam looks
at the immediate future
of virtual speakers

2018 was all about voice-controlled speakers and – for better or worse – this trend will continue apace. Amazon Alexa is now available in many speakers, including Sonos and new-to-the-UK brand Polk Audio; Google Assistant continues to improve; and Apple's Siri-controlled HomePod sounds great. I've lived with all three systems and tolerated their considerable foibles, and while nobody does it perfectly, at least the sound quality and design of the speakers has improved beyond measure.

It's a little way off yet, but the power of these brands, their flexibility and affordability will start to chop lumps off, rather than chip away at, the traditional hi-fi market.

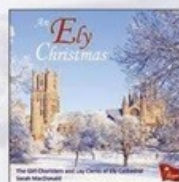
But for now, I expect to see more leading hi-fi brands focussing on improvements in sound quality by using higher resolution streaming such as MQA, and more devices taking advantage of the boost in audio that Bluetooth aptX can make. Apple's Airplay should also finally make sense – second-generation products will stream in CD quality while being able to form a multi-room system with compatible products from different brands.

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New and recent releases



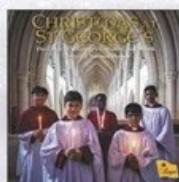
REGCD527

AN ELY CHRISTMAS

The Girl Choristers and Lay Clerks
of Ely Cathedral

directed by Sarah MacDonald

New carols, new arrangements, and a selection of beautiful and exhilarating Christmas favourites. Recorded in the glorious acoustic of Ely Cathedral, this disc offers twenty-three immediately attractive and captivating carols for Christmas. Of particular interest are first recordings of original new carols by Ben Parry, Gary Higginson, Matthew Larkin, Annabel Rooney, and the instantly-memorable winner of the BBC Radio Three Carol Competition 2017, 'Sir Christemas' by Bernard Trafford

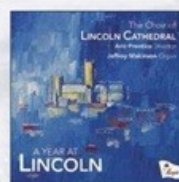


REGCD533

CHRISTMAS AT ST GEORGE'S

The Choir of St George's Cathedral,
Southwark directed by Norman Harper

An unusual selection of choral music for Christmas, framed by four of the great Christmas hymns, and six Gregorian antiphons for the two main Masses of the nativity celebration – Christmas Midnight Mass and the Mass for Christmas Day. The recording features first recordings of new carols and arrangements by Francis Duffy, Timothy Craig Harrison, Christian Strover, and Norman Harper, together with a rare recording of James MacMillan's motet *In splendoribus sanctorum*, with its virtuoso trumpet interludes brilliantly played by Simon Desbruslais.

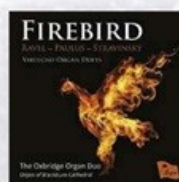


REGCD532

A YEAR AT LINCOLN

The Choir of Lincoln Cathedral
directed by Aric Prentice

The latest addition to the Regent 'A year at...' series marks our first recording with the Choir of Lincoln Cathedral. Music by Bingham, Blatchly, Brahms, Byrd, Chilcott, Elgar, Finzi, Lloyd, Hawes, Mendelssohn, Parsons, Tallis, Wood, Taverner, Vaughan Williams, Wesley, and Wilberg.



REGCD 500

FIREBIRD Virtuoso Organ Duets

The Oxbridge Organ Duo
Benedict Lewis-Smith and Julian Collings play
the organ of Blackburn Cathedral

Boléro Ravel, transcribed Andrew Senn

Paeon Stephen Paulus

Firebird Suite Stravinsky, transcribed Guy Bovet



CAROLS at CADOGAN

Wed 19 Dec 2018, 7.30pm
Cadogan Hall
London

A perfect evening of Christmas music

Join The Bach Choir, London City Brass and Philip Scriven for an evening of Christmas music and carols for all, featuring the winning entry in the Sir David Willcocks Carol Competition.

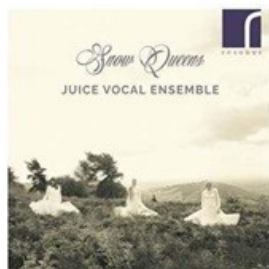
The Bach Choir
London City Brass
David Hill conductor
Philip Scriven organ
Nigel Bates &
Matthew Green percussion

Tickets £13.50-£32
thebachchoir.org.uk/concerts
020 7730 4500 (Cadogan Hall)

Group discount 20% off for ten or more tickets
020 7127 9114



Christmas with Sonoro
Michael Higgins organ
Neil Ferris conductor

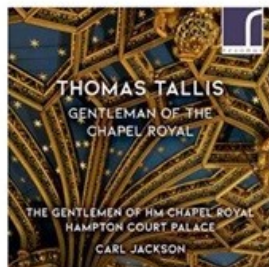


Snow Queens
Seasonal & winter music
Juice Vocal Ensemble

resonus classics
www.resonusclassics.com



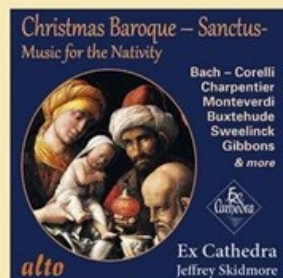
Music for Windy Instruments:
Sounds from the Court of James I
The English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble



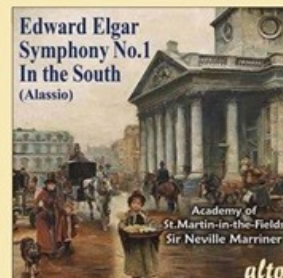
Thomas Tallis:
Gentleman of the Chapel Royal
The Gentlemen of HM Chapel Royal
Hampton Court Palace
Carl Jackson conductor

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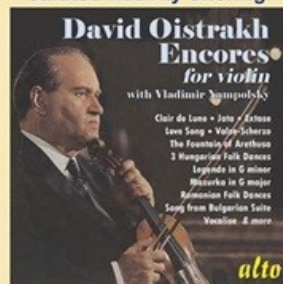
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ALC 1377 'supremely well
curated Nativity offering'



ALC 1385 'extremely good
- perfect tempo' (Gram)



ALC 1357 'Oistrakh's
Legendary encores'



ALN 1969 'Film fantasy
needs music magic' (J.Warner)

ALSO: ALC1395: Segovia: Guitar Fantasia; 1378: Sibelius: Piano Miniatures / Annette Servadei;
1604 (2CD): Mahler 9 / Walter + Mahler 4 / Reiner; 1379: Rodrigo: Guitar & Harp Concertos +
Fantasia / Yepes & Zabaleta; 4005 (4CD): Czech Piano Anthology / 4 composers / Radoslav Kvapil

www.altocd.com

www.musicalconcepts.net



Venue of the month

The UK's best concert halls

16. Caird Hall

Where: Dundee
Opened: 1923
Seats: 2,300

Fronted by ten fine Doric columns, Dundee's Caird Hall is an impressive sight as one heads towards it across City Square. Its presence owes much to the jute trade, as this was how businessman Sir James Caird became wealthy enough in the late 19th century to fund projects that included Shackleton's Antarctic expedition on the *Endurance* and, in 1914, providing his home city with a new concert venue, designed by architect James Thomson, and council buildings. Sadly for Caird, he never saw the completion of the building that would bear his name – the First World War halted construction and he had died long before the doors opened in 1923.

Many great stars from across the music spectrum – from Dame Nellie Melba to Elton John and Led Zeppelin – have appeared at Caird Hall over the decades, and it still hosts concerts by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra today. Pride of place is arguably given, however, to its organ, the first ever such instrument built specifically for a concert hall by the notable Harrison & Harrison firm. Refurbished in 1992, its armoury of 50 stops can be appreciated in regular recitals throughout the year.

Live choice

Paul Riley selects the UK's best concerts and operas for Christmas 2018



Santa-stic singers:
the Choir of Gonville and
Caius College, Cambridge

LONDON

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Cadogan Hall, 7 December
Tel: +44 (0)20 7730 4500
Web: www.cadoganhall.com

Jingle bells at the ready as sleigh rides by Delius and Prokofiev gild the RPO's selection box of yuletide favourites. They're topped and tailed by excerpts from Humperdinck's opera *Hänsel und Gretel* and Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker*. The conductor is Owain Arwel Hughes.

Christmas Festival St John's Smith Square, 8-23 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7222 1061
Web: www.sjss.org.uk
The St John's Christmas Festival has served as London's musical Advent calendar for over 30 years now, and Polyphony's *Messiah* under Stephen Layton has become something of a tradition. Layton also conducts Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, and among 2018's debutants are The English Concert and Ensemble les

Surprises, who explore Baroque Noël's, motets and sonatas from the Old and New Worlds.

Juice Vocal Ensemble Kings Place, 9 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7520 1490
Web: www.kingsplace.co.uk
As part of a Kings Place countdown to Christmas that includes *Tenebrae*, *Sonoro* and the Hanover Band and Chorus, Juice Vocal Ensemble launches its new album: *Snow Queens*. Commissions from Tarik O'Regan, Emily Hall and Alison Willis sit alongside arrangements of ancient carols, Renaissance lute songs and Kate Bush.

Temple Winter Festival Temple Church, 10-14 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7427 5641
Web: templewinterfestival.co.uk
While the ORA Singers under Suzi Digby build a programme around four Magnificat settings for their medieval-to-modern foray, Peter Phillips's Tallis Scholars take Palestrina's magnificent double-choir *Hodie Christus natus est* Mass as the start of an evening that includes the premiere of a new work by

Nico Muhly. Sansara and the Collegium Musicum of London also spread Christmas cheer.

BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus Barbican, 17 December

Tel: +44 (0)20 7638 8891
Web: www.barbican.org.uk
Berlioz's *L'enfance du Christ* (see also p68) takes up the Christmas story when Herod orders the massacre of the innocents, and the holy family takes flight into Egypt. Edward Gardner conducts, tenor Robert Murray is the narrator, mezzo Karen Cargill (see p26) is Mary and Matthew Best sings Herod.

SOUTH

Spiritato University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, 7 December

Tel: +44 (0)1865 244806
Web: www.musicatoxford.com
The theme of 'La notte di Natale' wraps wintry and festive concertos by Vivaldi, Corelli, Torelli and Locatelli around two cantatas by Alessandro Scarlatti including Christmas Eve's *O di Betlemme altera*. Augusta Hebbert is the soprano soloist.

Choir and Orchestra of the Enlightenment
St George's Bristol, 18 December
 Tel: +44 (0)845 40 24 001
 Web: www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk
 Launched by a swirl of strings and the fervour of three trumpets plus drums, Bach's joyous Nativity-to-Epiphany *Christmas Oratorio* is directed from the keyboard by Steven Devine.

EAST

The Choir of Gonville and Caius, Cambridge
Great St Mary's, Cambridge, 6 December
 Tel: +44 (0)1223 357851
 Web: cambridgeearlymusic.com
 Accompanied by period instruments, the Cambridge choir sings Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Messe de Minuit pour Noël* – into which he stitched nearly a dozen popular carols. German compliments of the season are dispatched by the composers Buxtehude, Schütz and Weckmann.

Britten Sinfonia and Voices
Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, 22 December
 Tel: +44 (0)845 548 7650
 Web: www.brittiensinfonia.com
 Hallelujah! With a dream team of soloists comprising soprano Sophie Bevan, countertenor Iestyn Davies, tenor Allan Clayton and baritone Roderick Williams, Britten Sinfonia's account of Handel's *Messiah* stands out from the crowd. Eamonn Dougan conducts.

MIDLANDS, NORTH & WALES

Puts's Silent Night
Town Hall, Leeds, 30 November-7 December
 Tel: +44 (0)844 848 2720
 Web: www.operanorth.co.uk
Silent Night, Kevin Puts's Pulitzer Prize-winning opera based on the story of the 1914 Christmas truce, receives its UK premiere in a production by Tim Albery. Nicholas Kok conducts (see 'Backstage with...') and Rupert Charlesworth is the German soldier transfixed by the singing of Scottish troops from across no-man's land.

Solomon's Knot
St Mary the Virgin, Nottingham, 1 December
 Tel: +44 (0)115 989 5555
 Web: solomonsknotcollective.com
 'Christmas in Leipzig' corrals three holders of the office of

Thomaskantor, culminating in JS Bach whose E flat Magnificat is sung with its interpolated festive laudes. A setting by his immediate predecessor Kuhnau and a motet by Schelle complete the ensemble Solomon's Knot's 10th-anniversary gift to itself.

York Early Music Christmas Festival
York, 8-15 December
 Tel: + (0)1904 658338
 Web: www.ncem.co.uk

A complete Bach *Christmas Oratorio*, 'Lullabies to an Infant King' from Voces8, and the Celtic gypsy klezmer of Dodo Street Band are among this year's presents waiting to be unwrapped in and around York's Walmgate. Ex Cathedral follows a Marian trail, while Improviso heads to 16th-century Spain and 17th-century Italy by way of Charpentier and Bach.

The Sixteen
St David's Hall, Cardiff, 9 December
 Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 8444
 Web: www.thesixteen.com

From seasonal Sweelinck and Sheppard to Joseph Phibbs and Cecilia McDowall, The Sixteen's exuberant time-traveling takes to the road, criss-crossing England from Taunton to Gateshead via a double stop-over at London's Cadogan Hall.

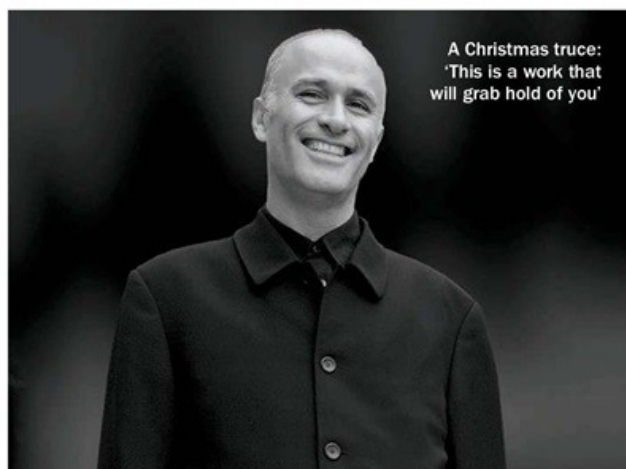
Sirinu
St Mary's Church, Warwick, 11 December
 Tel: +44 (0)1926 334418
 Web: www.leamingtonmusic.org

Bringing gentle anarchy to Leamington Music's Christmas Festival, Sirinu dusts down the gittern, hurdy-gurdy and shawm for a medieval feast presided over by the Lord of Misrule. Bookending it are the Hardy-esque revels of The Mellstock Band and the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge.

SCOTLAND & N IRELAND
Scottish Ensemble
Caird Hall, Dundee, 3 December
 Tel: +44 (0)1382 434940
 Web: www.scottishensemble.co.uk

Performed in its string orchestral arrangement, Vasks's *Musica Adventus* is paired with Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* to provide the seasonal heart of the Scottish Ensemble's seven-concert tour, which also enlists guitarist Sean Shibe for Vivaldi.

BACKSTAGE WITH... Conductor Nicholas Kok



A Christmas truce:
 'This is a work that
 will grab hold of you'

You're conducting Opera North's production of Kevin Puts's *Silent Night*. What's the story of the opera?

It's based on the 1914 Christmas truce, when the soldiers left the trenches to play football with one another. It's based on the French film *Joyeux Noël*, which I've decided to not watch until we've finished the production so I can keep a clear mind. There's a love story at the heart of the narrative between two opera singers, but there are lots of other characters featured.

Does this mean the chorus has more of a starring role?

Yes – there's lots of individual vignettes and moments where the chorus members step out to perform solo roles. It's why it's so great that Opera North are doing this production, because they always fill the chorus with soloists. At chorus rehearsals, I'm struck by one amazing voice after another. This work is a real challenge for them too. The text is made up of four languages, and the main regiment is Scottish – it's difficult to master singing English with a Scottish accent.

What soundworld does Puts create in this opera?

It's very approachable, but I don't mean that in a derogatory way at all. Contemporary classical music is searching for a language that can engage more people, and *Silent Night* achieves this while also having very rhythmically complex vocal lines. It's got quite an American aesthetic – you have a real sense of where the music has come from. This is a work that will grab hold of you.

Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 14 December
 Tel: +44 (0)131 228 1155
 Web: www.rso.org.uk

Prokofiev's *Winter Bonfire* spreads a warming glow as conductor Thomas Søndergård and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra prepare to enter the magical Christmas Eve world of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. And there's more Tchaikovsky: cellist Johannes Moser plays the debonair *Rococo Variations*.

Ulster Orchestra
Belfast Waterfront, 4 January
 Tel: +44 (0)28 9033 4455
 Web: www.ulsterorchestra.org.uk
 Belfast will see in 2019 in Viennese style with tenor Noah Stewart among others. Conductor Christopher Altstaedt and the Ulster Orchestra take a leaf out of the Vienna Philharmonic's traditional New Year's Day offering, relishing a programme of Straussian evergreens that includes the *Blue Danube* waltz and the *Radetzky March*.

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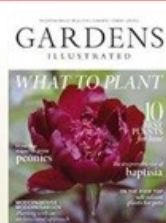
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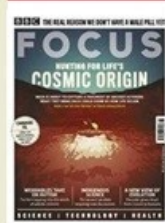
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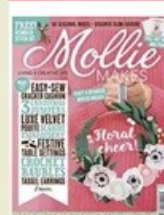


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TV&Radio

From wintry walks to adventures with Paddington, we choose this year's festive highlights

1 St John's Advent Carol Service

The annual Advent Carol Service from St John's College, Cambridge returns with the world premiere of Cecilia McDowall's *A Prayer to St John the Baptist*. This will be accompanied by the usual traditional Advent carols, as well as works by a selection of contemporary composers including Gabriel Jackson. **Radio 3: Choral Evensong; 21 Dec, 3pm**

2 Winter Lights

Trumpeter Alison Balsom joins the BBC Concert Orchestra in Guy Barker's concerto *The Lanterne of Light* at the Southbank Centre, as part of an evening of wintry works. The contemporary programme includes premieres of new pieces by Sarah Jenkins and Dobrinka Tabakova. **Radio 3: Live in Concert; 5 Dec, 7.30pm**

3 Handel's Messiah

You can't have Christmas without Handel's *Messiah*. Radio 3 will be broadcasting this year's rendition from St David's Hall, Cardiff, with Katherine Watson, Iestyn Davies, Gwilym Bowen and Neal Davies appearing as soloists. Get ready to join in on the rousing 'Hallelujah' chorus. **Radio 3: Live in Concert; 6 Dec, 7.30pm**

4 Temple Winter Festival

The stunning 12th-century Temple Church in London plays host to the Tallis Scholars in a concert formed around Palestrina's jubilant double-choir mass. Also on the bill are two settings of the *Magnificat* by Praetorius and Nesbitt, and a new work by Nico Muhly. **Radio 3: Live in Concert; 13 Dec, 7.30pm**

5 EBU Christmas Music Day

The European Broadcasting Union's Christmas Music Day returns for its 23rd year,

THE 12 BEST CHRISTMAS PROGRAMMES



Breaking the ice: Horatio Clare explores the wanderings of Goethe (Choice 9)

with concerts broadcast live from 13 European countries, all showcasing their nations' traditional Christmas music. The festive tour begins in Helsinki's Kallio Church, with a chorale written by Sibelius specifically for the bells of this church, and ends with a concert of Bach from the Sankt Pölten Cathedral in Austria. **Radio 3: 16 Dec, 1pm**

6 Breakfast Carol Competition

Budding composers across the UK have been submitting their four-part carols for Radio 3's annual Breakfast Carol Competition. This year, entries were set to *The Bee Carol*, written by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy. The winning carol, voted for by the public, will also be performed throughout Christmas Day on Radio 3. **Radio 3: Breakfast; 21 Dec**

7 Paddington's Musical Adventures

Join the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conductor Ben Palmer and narrator Simon Russell Beale for a two-part Paddington special at the Barbican. The stories, accompanied by illustrated projections and musical interludes, see Paddington make his conducting debut and become a member of the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral. **Radio 3: Afternoon Concert; 21 Dec, 2pm**

8 Rutter & Chilcott Conduct Christmas Carols

The music of John Rutter and Bob Chilcott (see p21) has become embedded in British festive traditions. This year, they join forces to conduct their yuletide repertoire with the BBC Singers and BBC Concert Orchestra at Saffron Hall. Expect seasonal choices including

Rutter's *Star Carol* and Chilcott's *The Shepherd's Carol*. **Radio 3 in Concert; 21 Dec, 7.30pm**

9 Winter Walk

Following his walk in Bach's footsteps last year, writer Horatio Clare returns to Radio 3 for an immersive slow radio walk through Germany inspired by the idea of 'the wanderer'. Clare will discuss the great writers and composers who celebrated nature wanderings, including Goethe, Schubert and Mahler. **Radio 3: Winter Walk; 24 Dec, 2pm**

10 A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

Celebrating its centenary, the 2018 service will be music director Stephen Cleobury's last. A newly commissioned carol by Judith Weir, *O Mercy Divine*, will be performed by the choir alongside cellist Guy Johnston, who was once a King's chorister under Cleobury's leadership. **BBC Two and Radio 4: Carols from King's; 24 Dec, 3pm; Radio 3; 25 Dec, 2pm**

11 Berlioz's L'enfance du Christ at the Barbican

Edward Gardner leads the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Karen Cargill and Robert Murray in Berlioz's exquisite oratorio this Christmas. In this month's *Building a Library* (p68) we name the greatest recordings of this festive work. **Radio 3 in Concert; 24 Dec, 7.30pm**

12 Last Night of the Proms on New Year's Eve

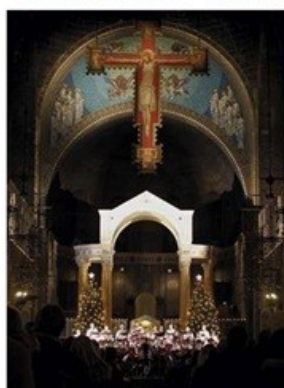
Why not revisit one of the highlights of this year's musical calendar? Andrew Davis conducts the usual Last Night fare, as well as works by Hindemith, Milhaud and Panufnik. Saxophonist Jess Gillam and baritone Gerald Finley feature as soloists. **Radio 3 in Concert; 31 Dec, 7.30pm**

CATHEDRALS, CHURCHES AND ABBEYS

AT CHRISTMAS

There is nothing finer than the sound of music at Christmas, especially when played or sung out in these beautiful ancient buildings. Take a look at what is coming up at a cathedral, church or abbey near you over this festive season.

Westminster Cathedral



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www.ticketmaster.co.uk

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visits@worcestercathedral.org.uk
www.worcestercathedral.co.uk

Hereford Cathedral



With many different services and events taking place during Advent and Christmas, a warm welcome awaits all at Hereford Cathedral this year. Musical highlights include the Christmas Sparkle Organ Concert and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Please visit our website for more details.

01432 374 200
www.herefordcathedral.org

Buckfast Abbey



Buckfast Abbey is an impressive Benedictine monastery nestled in the foothills of Dartmoor National Park. A rich musical tradition awaits visitors, from the Gregorian chant sung by the monks to choral services and concerts sung by the Abbey Choir. Christmas Midnight Mass will Broadcast live on BBC 1 television at 11.45pm on Monday 24th December.

01364 645 500
www.buckfast.org.uk

Derby Cathedral



Derby Cathedral is a beautiful Georgian jewel in the heart of the city. Highlights this Christmas include the Advent Carol Service on Sunday 2nd, 6pm; Handel's Messiah on Saturday 8th, 7pm; and the two Cathedral Carol Services at 4pm and 6.30pm on Christmas Eve. The Christmas celebrations conclude at the Epiphany Carol Service on Sunday 6th January 2019 at 6pm.

www.derbycathedral.org

Saint Patrick's Cathedral



Saint Patrick's Cathedral is proud to host New Dublin Voices on 1 December, part of The Jonathan Swift Festival 2018. The choir will perform a stunning array of pieces from the 18th century, accompanied by more contemporary seasonal part-songs for all to enjoy amidst the spectacular acoustics of this 13th century building.

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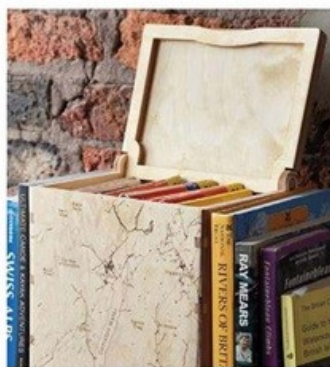
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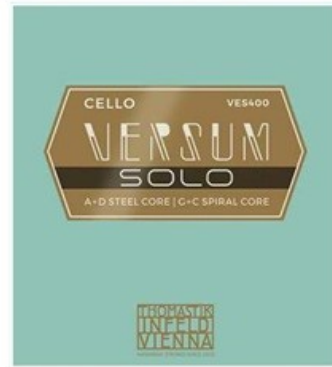
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Thursday 13 December 2018, 7.30pm at Cadogan Hall

Vivaldi: Gloria and Bach: Magnificat

with Counterpoint (Period Instrument Ensemble)

Monday 4 March 2019, 7.30pm at Barbican Hall

Brahms: Requiem

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Wednesday 10 July 2019, 7.30pm at Queen Elizabeth Hall

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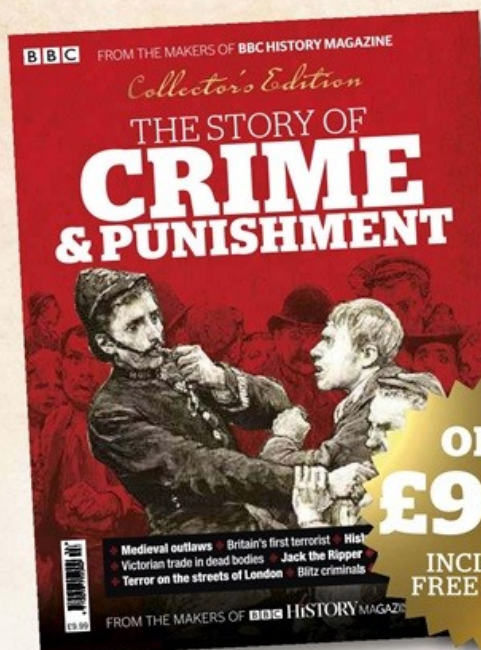
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The Christmas Quiz answers

From p30

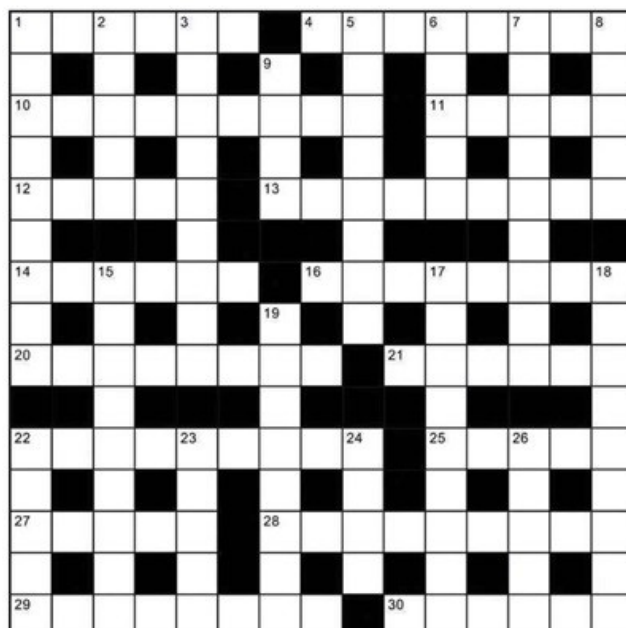
1. James MacMillan
2. The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge
3. Rimsky-Korsakov
4. Vaughan Williams
5. Massenet's *Werther*
6. Handel's *Messiah*
7. JS Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*
8. Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*
9. Puccini's *La bohème*
10. Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*
11. Berg
12. Haydn
13. Clara Schumann
14. Philip Glass
15. 'Winter Daydreams' (or 'Winter Dreams')
16. *Belshazzar's Feast*
17. 'Song to the moon'
18. *A Night on Bald Mountain* (or *A Night on Bare Mountain*)
19. *Good King Wenceslas*
20. 32
21. At the end of the Labour Party Conference (it provides the tune to *The Red Flag*, the Labour Party's adopted anthem)
22. Henry Purcell
23. *Appalachian Spring*
24. *The Sans Day Carol*
25. In a supermarket (in Madrid)
26. Snails
27. The King's Singers
28. Aida Garifullina
29. Sir Andrew Davis
30. Montserrat Caballé

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Crossword set by Paul Henderson



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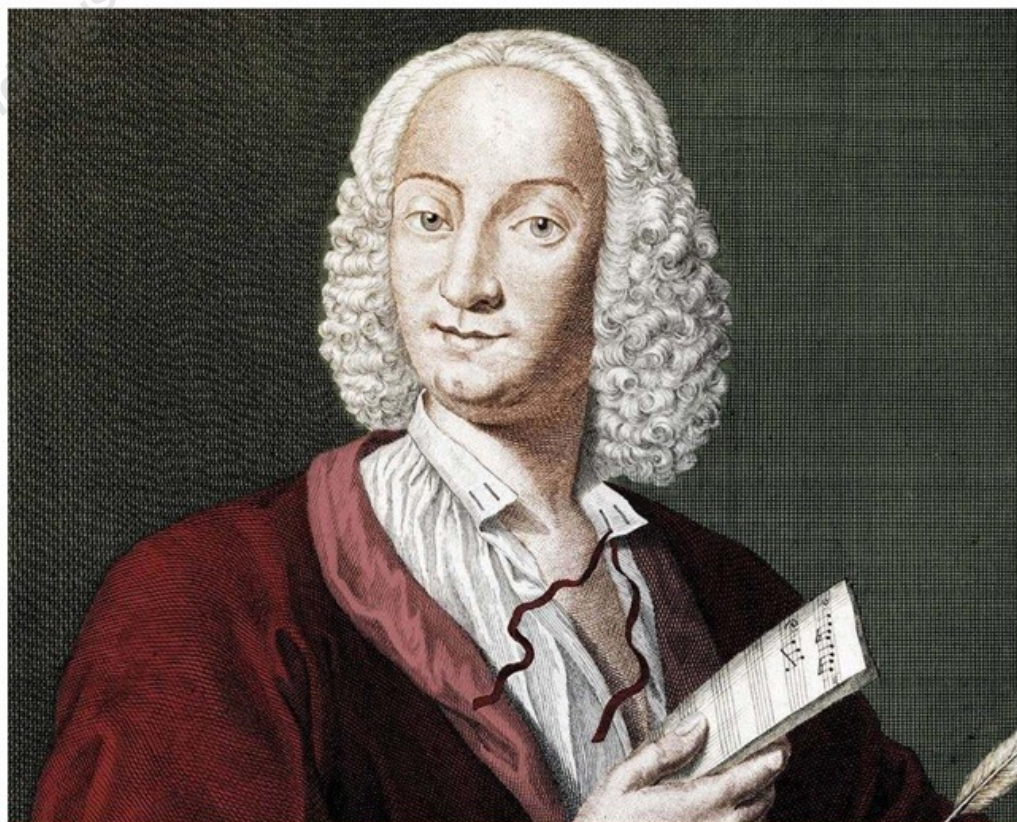
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ACROSS

- 1 French librettist almost set to receive copy (6)
- 4 See 29 across
- 10 Composer an angelic figure in Italy (9)
- 11 No exam will omit ultimate components of music (5)
- 12 Clapton song, song linked to US city (5)
- 13/20 Seasonal work by Britten a fool broadcast with money scarce (1,8,2,6)
- 14 A soprano wrong to accept Government grant (6)
- 16 See 22 across
- 20 See 13 across
- 21 High regard satisfies core of orchestra, on reflection (6)
- 22/16 Wildly praise best nun to us in seasonal Tallis piece (4,5,3,5)
- 25 Words in text from very old contralto, alto and bass (5)
- 27 Stopped accepting singer finally forgot the words (5)
- 28 Schumann piece, new, better without start or end (9)
- 29/4 Seasonal work by Berlioz – funniest childcare arrangement I ignored (8,2,6)
- 30 Small awareness of music shown by the French composer in England (6)

DOWN

- 1 Dance tune in description of vespers, nothing more (9)
- 2 Like oboes? Not initially eager (5)
- 3 See 23 down
- 5 Ives symphony played in revues (8)
- 6 German composer getting a lot of attention around New Zealand (5)
- 7 Opening of piece – questionably blue – having difficulty (2,7)
- 8 Very nice, giving some movement a style (5)
- 9 Turned up keen singer (4)
- 15 English tenor probing in score sorted out concealed stuff (9)
- 17 Remains very out of sorts in North-Eastern home of US symphony orchestra (9)
- 18 I seem upset about word, keeping up long note (9)
- 19 Affectionate Arrau ultimately avoiding cult piano playing (8)
- 22 It may soften sound of bells, restricting source of din (5)
- 23/3 Iconic teacher is a noble guardian, possibly (5,9)
- 24 No time for line of music or bar (4)
- 26 Provide no end of paper for US composer (5)



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As autumn turns to winter, we take a look at the four seasons of the Baroque composer's life, from his birth in Venice to death in Vienna



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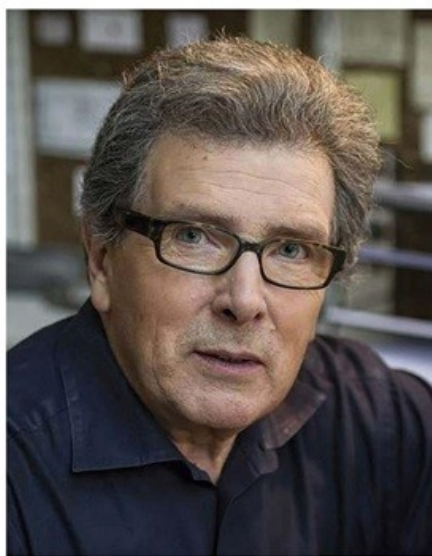
Howard Blake

Composer

Celebrating his 80th birthday this year, the prolific British composer is best known for his score for the hit 1982 animation *The Snowman* and its song *Walking in the Air*. Born in London, Blake studied at the Royal Academy of Music before embarking on a career as a commercial composer. The accolades rolled in, but Blake also pursued his interest in writing music for the concert hall. His piano music has been recorded by Vladimir Ashkenazy, while the late Sir Neville Marriner conducted a disc of Blake's woodwind concertos.

My mother played the piano very well, and my favourite piece was the Chopin Waltz in A minor. My bedroom was next to where the piano was in the living room, and the sound came through the wall at a deafening volume. We had a tutor book that had a picture of the keyboard, and I wrote all the names onto the piano in indelible pencil and taught myself to play that waltz. Then I started having lessons, and my grandmother gave me Solomon's record of **CHOPIN's** Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27 No. 2 and I thought it was the most marvellous playing I had ever heard. It made me practise more and believe I could play the piano properly.

I went to grammar school in Brighton and I was being groomed to go to Oxford to read History. I was all set to go when I went in for the Hastings Music Festival – I won three years at the Royal Academy of Music, all paid for with a university grant. I said, blow Oxford! The headmaster was absolutely furious. We had one master at school who was into modern music, otherwise it was still Rossini's *William Tell* Overture and Bach's Air on a G string. But I was about 15 when I heard **BARTÓK's** Third Piano Concerto and it was eye-opening. He certainly was an influence when it came to harmony, texture and orchestration.



The choices

Chopin Nocturne in D flat, Op. 27 No. 2
Solomon (piano) Testament SBT1030

Bartók Piano Concerto No. 3
Julius Katchen (piano); L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande/Ernest Ansermet
Testament SBT1300

Howard Brubeck Dialogues
New York Phil/Bernstein; Dave Brubeck Quartet Sony G010001223089M

Schubert Piano Trio in B flat
Isaac Stern (violin), Leonard Rose (cello), Eugene Istomin (piano)
Sony G010002681880P

Blake *The Snowman*
Peter Auty (treble); Sinfonia of London/
Howard Blake Sony G010001289371Q

In the 1950s, jazz was a very big thing. One day a friend played me the opening of a piece which was dissonant and decidedly classical, but then suddenly into it came the Dave Brubeck Quartet. It was *Dialogues*, written by Dave's brother, **HOWARD BRUBECK**. I still think it's the most marvellous piece as it combines a classical feel with jazz in a way that's

almost impossible to do. Along with the BBC Third Programme's *History of Jazz*, of which I listened to every episode, it gave me an interest in jazz.

A while after I left the Royal Academy, I worked as a jazz pianist in clubs and then as a session pianist at Abbey Road. I met all sorts of people there, one of whom was the great Bernard Herrmann, who wrote the *Psycho* score. He recommended me to Laurie Johnson, and I took over writing *The Avengers* series when I was 27 or 28. I made an absolute fortune. I also overdid it and collapsed from overwork. I had to stop. One day I just drove off to Cornwall and stayed there for three months. I thought I'd start again, and I had enough money to buy a water mill in mid-Sussex with six acres, a lake and a waterfall – it was a wonderful place. I started listening to Mozart, Bach, Stravinsky, and then suddenly I discovered this record of Schubert. It sounds silly but I didn't know Schubert's chamber music, and it was a revelation. This recording of **SCHUBERT's** Piano Trio in B flat started me on a whole new direction.

I must excuse myself for picking a record of mine, but *The Snowman* was a big turning point, and it's from the point of view of **PETER AUTY's** great performance. My friend John Coates had shown me an eight-minute pencil demo of *The Snowman*, including the flying scene of the boy and the snowman. In my head was a tune that dated from when I had gone to Cornwall and walked along the beach, a tune of complete innocence, wanting to go back to feeling the way you felt as a child. I had never found where to put it until I saw this scene. It was just a tune, and later I wrote the lyric 'Walking in the air'. I asked a singer friend where I would find the best treble in the world, and she put me in touch with Barry Rose at St Paul's Cathedral. We chose Peter Auty – he recorded it the next day, and it's absolutely fantastic. @

Interview by Rebecca Franks

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